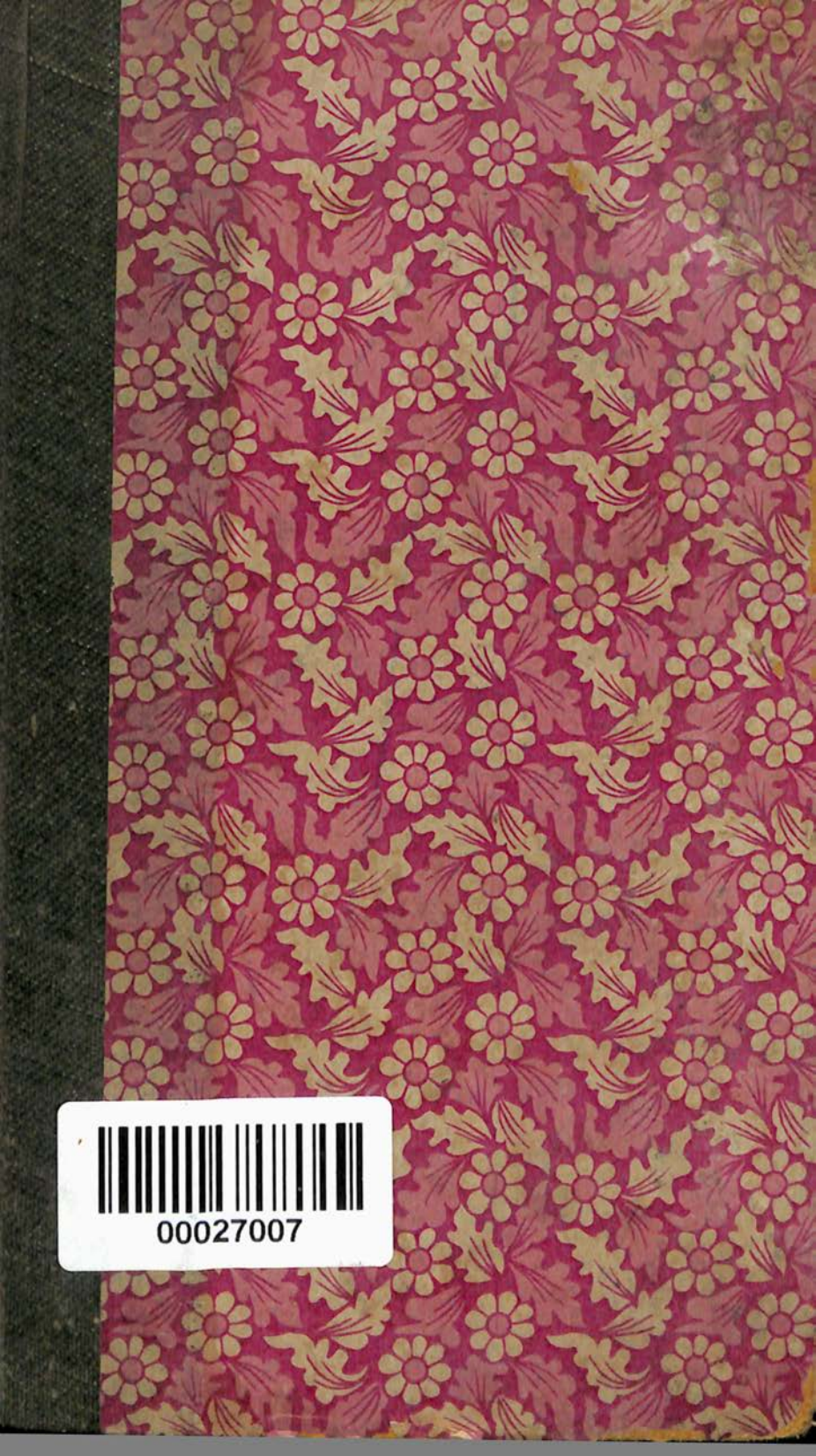
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THE

SPEECHES

OF

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

WILLIAM PITT,

IN THE

HOUSE OF COMMONS.

QUANTO MAGIS ADMIRABEMINI SI AUDISSETIS IPSUM!

CICERO.

THE SECOND EDITION.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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MR. PITT'S

PARLIAMENTARY SPEECHES.

June 17, 1793.

MR. FOX having moved an address to his Majesty, requesting him to take the earliest measures for procuring Peace with France on terms consistent with the justice and policy of the British nation,

Mr. PITT rose to deliver his sentiments in opposition to the motion:

After what has been already so ably urged, I do not, in the present stage of the debate, conceive it necessary to speak to the merits of the question. The almost unanimous call of the house shews, that on that point they have already sufficiently made up their minds. But something has been alleged on the general grounds on which the motion is brought forward, and particular allusions have been made to me, which I cannot allow to pass over in silence. The motion has been introduced by the honourable gentleman on the eve of the conclusion of the session, no doubt as a solemn expression of the sentiments entertained by him on the present state of affairs, and I should be sorry that my opinion on the present occasion should be at all equivocal. I do not, then, hesitate to declare that this motion is in itself the most impolitic and preposterous which could possibly be adopted, the most contradictory to those general principles which at all times ought to regulate our conduct, and the most unsuitable to those particular circumstances in which we are now placed. Such is my opinion of the nature of this motion, which points out to us a line of conduct we can by no means pursue, namely, to make peace upon terms which even,

if within our reach, we ought not to accept, but which, in fact, is only calculated to amuse and delude the people, by holding out to them a possibility of peace, when, in reality, peace is impossible, and thus serving to create groundless discontents and dissatisfaction with the present situation of affairs.

Are we, I would ask, in pursuance of this motion, to be content merely with the French relinquishing those conquests which they have unjustly made, without either obtaining reparation for the injuries they have already done us, or security against their future repetition? There might, indeed, be situations in which we might be compelled to adopt such a conduct. Against necessity there is no possibility of contending. But, indeed, it would be rather strange if we should do that at the beginning of a most successful war, which could only be advisable at the conclusion of a most disastrous one. It would be a principle somewhat new, if, when unjustly attacked, and forced into a war, we should think proper to cease from all hostilities, as soon as the enemy should be unwilling to support their attack, and go on with the contest. Has such been the case in any of the most favourite periods of the history of this country, to which the honourable gentleman is so fond of alluding? Where can he find any such principle in any of those wars which this country has carried on in support of its independence? And if so, what is there in the peculiar situation of the French, the disturbers of the peace of Europe, and the unprovoked aggressors of this country, that should require any other measure to be dealt to them, than what we have been accustomed on former occasions to afford to our enemies? With a prospect of success so great as we have in the present moment, are we to grant them an impunity for all those designs which they have so unjustly formed and attempted to carry into execution? Would this tend in any degree to remedy the temporary inconvenience to this country, which the honourable gentleman has stated resulting from the war, but which, in reality, is produced by collateral causes? In no case would the conduct here pointed be expedient. But of all cases, where we ought not to

merely because the enemy stops, is that where we have suffered an injury without having either obtained reparation or security.

This I will illustrate by what is at present our situation. And first I will ask, what was the state of this country with respect to France, previous to the declaration of war on her part? We then contended, first, That she had broken a treaty with our allies, which we were bound to support: secondly, That she had engaged in schemes of ambition and aggrandizement, inconsistent with the interests of this country, and the general security of Europe: thirdly, That she had entertained principles hostile to all governments, and more particularly to our own. In consequence of all these circumstances, you then declared in addresses to his Majesty, that if proper satisfaction was not obtained, a war must be the consequence. But while this was in agitation, they had themselves declared war, and been guilty of a sudden and unprovoked aggression upon this country. Is then that aggression, the climax of all their injuries, to induce you to abandon those reasonable views of satisfaction which before you entertained? The necessity of security against those three points, their disregard of treaties, their projects of ambition, and their dangerous principles, certainly becomes greater, inasmuch as their injuries are increased by the aggression. The argument for satisfaction, instead of being diminished, derives greater strength from this last circumstance. Indeed if we were foiled, we might then be induced to abandon those views with which we had set out, to submit to the hardship of our fate, and to receive such terms as necessity might dictate. But those terms which the motion prescribed are not such as are to be aimed at in the first instance, but such as are only to be submitted to in the last extremity. The question then is, whether we shall now court calamity, whether we shall, after a most successful commencement, voluntarily submit to all the most direful consequences of failure and defeat? At present we have both right and interest on our side. Shall we abandon both? Shall we, with the means of doing ourselves justice, pass by the most repeated and aggra-

vated injuries, and grant peace to those whose unprovoked aggression alone compelled us to arm in our own defence? The question resolves itself into this; shall we, from a view of the present situation of the belligerent powers, risk more by vigorously persisting in the war till we have obtained its objects, or by abandoning it without either reparation or security? I shall only put the question, and leave it to you to decide.

Allow me only to subjoin a few remarks with reference to some points urged by the honourable gentleman who made the motion. We thought it necessary in the first instance, upon being attacked, to enter vigorously into the war. Did we not see the evils which we might expect to encounter in carrying it on? Were we insensible of those calamities with which every war is attended? Have these evils and calamities turned out to be greater than at first were expected and foreseen? On this point I shall not refer you to the inflamed exaggerations of the honourable gentleman, who predicted from the war, even in its commencement, every possible calamity, such as the most alarming discontents at home, the total stagnation of commerce, and interruption of public prosperity; and who represented that its infallible consequence must be not to check the schemes and repulse the progress of the enemy, but, on the contrary, to unite their views and concentrate their vigour. No—however justified I might be in taking this statement, I shall refer you only to the more moderate apprehensions of those who, though convinced of the necessity of the war, were not insensible to its dreadful consequences. These apprehensions happily have been disappointed, and the very reverse of those calamities, which there was but too much reason to dread, has taken place. The war has been attended, even in its outset, with the most brilliant, rapid, and unexpected success. The views of the enemy have experienced a most effectual check, and every circumstance concurs to favour the hope of our being able completely to accomplish every object of the war Is there any thing, then, in this situation, to induce us to abandon our views of reparation and security?—Are we to give up our claims of satisfaction, merely

because we have been beyond example successful in repelling an unjust attack? To urge this point, would indeed be wasting the time of the house.

The only question that remains, is, at what period, and from what situation of affairs, we are to obtain that reparation and security which we desire? How long are we to wait for these objects? Are we to place them upon circumstances which may never happen, and thus pursue them without any possibility of attaining our end, which may be the case if we look to the establishment of any particular government in France? The answer to these questions, like the degree of security and reparation to be obtained, depends upon circumstances of comparison. I declare, that on the part of this government there was no intention, if the country had not been attacked, to interfere in the internal affairs of France. This was clearly proved by the system of neutrality, on our part, so strictly observed. But having been attacked, I affirm, that there is nothing, either in the addresses to his Majesty, or the declarations of his servants, which pledges us not to take advantage of any interference in the internal affairs of France that may be necessary. I, for my own part, repeat, that I have given no such pledge. I do not say that if, without any interference, sufficient security and reparation could be had for this country, I would not, in that case, be of opinion that we ought to abstain from all interference, and allow their government to remain even upon its present footing. But I consider the question of obtaining these, while the same principle that now prevails continues to actuate their government, to be extremely difficult, if not impossible. I should certainly think, that the best security we could obtain, would be in the end of that wild ungoverned system, from which have resulted those injuries against which it is necessary to guard. There are, however, degrees and proportions of security which may be obtained and with which we ought to rest satisfied; these must depend upon the circumstances that shall afterwards arise, and cannot be ascertained by any previous definition. But when you have seen yourselves and all Europe attacked—when you have seen

a system established, violating all treaties, disregarding all obligations, and, under the name of the rights of man, uniting the principles of usurpation abroad, tyranny and confusion at home —you will judge, whether you ought to sit down without some security against the consequences of such a system being again brought into action. And this security, it appears to me, can only be obtained in one of three modes 1st, That these principles shall no longer predominate; or 2dly, That those, who are now engaged in them, shall be taught that they are impracticable, and convinced of their own want of power to carry them into execution; or 3dly, That the issue of the present war shall be such as, by weakening their power of attack, shall strengthen your power of resistance. Without these, you may indeed have an armed truce, a temporary suspension of hostilities; but no permanent peace; no solid security to guard you against the repetition of injury and the renewal of attack. If on these points we have made up our minds, if we are determined to prosecute the war till we shall obtain proper satisfaction, and at least be able to provide some security for the continuance of peace, the present motion can only tend to fetter the operations of war, to delude our subjects, to gratify the factious, to inflame the discontented, to discourage our allies, to strengthen our enemies.

What could be the effect of any negociation for peace in the present moment? It is not merely to the character of Marat, with whom we would have to treat, that I object; it is not to the horror of those crimes which have stained their legislators, crimes in every stage rising above another in point of enormity; but I object to the consequences of that character, to the effect of those crimes. They are such as render negociation useless, and must entirely deprive of stability any peace which could be concluded in such circumstances. Where is our security for the performance of a treaty, where we have neither the good faith of a nation, nor the responsibility of a monarch? The moment that the mob of Paris becomes under the influence of a new leader, mature deliberations are reversed, the most solemn

engagements are retracted, our free will is altogether controlled by force. In every one of the stages of their repeated revolutions we have said, "Now we have seen the worst, the measure of iniquity is complete, we shall no longer be shocked or astonished by the contemplation of added crimes and increasing enormities." The next mail gave us reason to reproach ourselves with our credulity, and, by presenting us with fresh crimes and enormities still more dreadful, excited impressions of new astonishment and accumulated horror. All the crimes which disgrace history have occurred in one country, in a space so short, and with circumstances so highly aggravated, as outrun thought, and exceed imagination. Should we treat with Marat, before we had finished the negociation he might again have descended to the dregs of the people from whom he sprung, and have given place to a still more desperate villain. A band of leaders had swayed the mob in constant succession, all resembling in guilt, but each striving to improve upon the crime of his predecessor, and swell the black catalogue with new modes and higher gradations of wickedness—

Ætas parentum pejor avis tulit
Nos nequiores, mox daturos
Progeniem vitiosiorem.

No treaty can exist on their good faith independent of the terms of peace. Could they be bound by engagements more solemn than those to which they had pledged themselves in return for our neutrality? What new engagements can be more binding, or from what part of the character of the leaders, or what change in the principles of action, can we expect greater good faith, or stricter attention to engagements, than were exhibited by their predecessors? To make a treaty with them would be only to afford them an opportunity of breaking it off before it was finished, or violating it in its very commencement.

But if the motion can answer no good purpose, can it answer no bad one? Might it not serve to encourage the French?

What the honourable gentleman reserved as the last part of his argument, seemed particularly to have this tendency, the conclusion which he drew of the necessity of a peace from the situation of the country. If we are really come to that period of distress and embarrassment, that peace upon such terms is necessary, we must indeed submit to the decrees of Providence with the resignation with which we would submit to the sacrifice of our independence. If the period of our ruin is come, we must prepare to meet the fate which we cannot avert; we cannot meet it in any shape more dreadful than that which is proposed by the motion of the honourable gentleman. But our situation is not yet so desperate. With respect to the embarrassment of credit, and the consequent interruption of commerce, I may safely say, that none have watched it more carefully than myself, none can have felt it more anxiously. The honourable gentleman states the means of relief, which have been adopted by the legislature, as, in his opinion, a proof of the extent of the calamity. For my part, I have formed a very different conclusion. The effect of the relief held out by the legislature, even before it was experienced, was completely to restore confidence and vigour to commerce—a proof that the embarrassed state of credit was only temporary, and, in a great measure, accidental. It clearly was not the effect of the war in which this country was engaged, but was influenced by the state of the Continent, where the war had previously subsisted, and where it had taken away the market for our commodities. This embarrassment then could only be ascribed to that cause which had produced so many other calamities—that destroying spirit on the Continent, which devours not only the fruits, but the seeds of industry—which overturns the very altar of society, and lets loose upon the world all the horrors of anarchy and desolation.

The question then is, whether we shall persevere in those exertions, by which we may at least remove this inconvenience, while, in co-operation with our allies, we strive to remove its cause—a cause which, if not checked, might have led to distress and ruin? The present motion, by magnifying the inconvenience

which we have sustained into a calamity, is calculated to give a false impression, and give to what at most could only be the object of apprehension at home, all the mischievous consequences of a real distress abroad. It is calculated to discourage our allies, and inspire our enemies with confidence.

Having thus given my opinion as a member of parliament, there are some allusions which have been made to myself, as a member of the cabinet, which I am called upon to notice. I have only to say, that if ever that honourable gentleman should be a member of the cabinet, I trust that he will be better informed of the proceedings of the councils of other nations, than at present he seems to be with what every man would desire to have some acquaintance with—those of his own. He stated, that he brought forward his motion with a view of giving support to certain opinions, which he understood to be entertained in the cabinet respecting the war. If he brought forward his motion from any motive of personal kindness to me, I have only to request that he will withdraw it. Not having lately been much in the habit of reading newspapers, I could not easily conceive to whom the honourable gentleman alluded. Indeed, there is no proposition which I could deem so impolitic to be brought forward by any of his Majesty's servants as the present motion. If there is any difference in opinion between me and the other members of the cabinet, I can only assure him, that I am the most determined to oppose the grounds and principles upon which that motion is founded. The question is, whether, in conjunction with our allies, with whom our own prosperity is so intimately connected, and with those prospects of success which our situation affords, we shall persevere vigorously to oppose those destructive principles with which, even though baffled at present, we may expect to contend to the latest hours of our lives? and on this issue I allow it to rest. I have spoken at much greater length than at first I intended; but on this subject, whenever it occurs, I find it impossible to keep those bounds which I had prescribed to myself, prompted as I am to enlarge by the dearest feelings and principles of my heart, affection and

gratitude to my sovereign, and that duty which I owe as a member of the community.

The motion passed in the negative;

Ayes 47
Noes 187

January 21, 1794.

DEBATE on the address in answer to his Majesty's most gracious speech * on opening the session.

The address, which was moved by Lord Cliffden and seconded by Sir Peter Burrell, was strenuously opposed by Mr. Fox, who, at the conclusion of his speech, moved the following amendment,—"To recommend to his Majesty to treat, as speedily as possible, for a peace with France upon safe and advantageous terms, without any reference to the nature or form of the government that might exist in that country."

Mr. PITT observed, that the motion which had been brought forward by the right honourable gentleman † who spoke last, amounted to little less than negativing the address, and upon this principle, what had previously been said by the noble lord ‡,

* "*My Lords and Gentlemen*,

"THE circumstances under which you are now assembled, require your most serious attention.

"We are engaged in a contest, on the issue of which depend the maintenance of our constitution, laws, and religion: and the security of all civil society.

"You must have observed, with satisfaction, the advantages which have been obtained by the arms of the allied powers, and the change which has taken place in the general situation of Europe since the commencement of the war. The United Provinces have been protected from invasion; the Austrian Netherlands have been recovered and maintained; and places of considerable importance have been acquired on the frontiers of France. The re-capture of Mentz, and the subsequent successes of the allied armies on the Rhine, have, notwithstanding the advantages recently obtained by the ene-

† Mr. Fox. ‡ Lord Mornington.

exactly referred to the subject of debate. From the length to which the discussion had been carried, and the lateness of the hour, it was impossible for him to go much into detail; yet in circumstances of such peculiar and transcendent importance as

my in that quarter, proved highly beneficial to the common cause. Powerful efforts have been made by my allies in the south of Europe; the temporary possession of the town and port of Toulon has greatly distressed the operations of my enemies; and in the circumstances attending the evacuation of that place, an important and decisive blow has been given to their naval power, by the distinguished conduct, abilities, and spirit of my commanders, officers, and forces, both by sea and land.

" The French have been driven from their possessions and fishery at Newfoundland, and important and valuable acquisitions have been made both in the East and West Indies.

" At sea our superiority has been undisputed, and our commerce so effectually protected, that the losses sustained have been inconsiderable, in proportion to its extent, and to the captures made on the contracted trade of the enemy.

" The circumstances by which the farther progress of the allies has hitherto been impeded, not only prove the necessity of vigour and perseverance on our part, but, at the same time, confirm the expectation of ultimate success.

" Our enemies have derived the means of temporary exertion, from a system which has enabled them to dispose arbitrarily of the lives and property of a numerous people, and which openly violates every restraint of justice, humanity, and religion; but these efforts, productive as they necessarily have been of internal discontent and confusion in France, have also tended rapidly to exhaust the natural and real strength of that country.

" Although I cannot but regret the necessary continuance of the war, I should ill consult the essential interests of my people, if I were desirous of peace on any grounds but such as may provide for their permanent safety, and for the independence and security of Europe. The attainment of these ends is still obstructed by the prevalence of a system in France, equally incompatible with the happiness of that country, and with the tranquillity of all other nations.

" Under this impression, I thought proper to make a declaration of the views and principles by which I am guided. I have ordered a copy of this declaration to be laid before you, together with copies of several conventions and treaties with different powers, by which you will perceive how large a part of Europe is united in a cause of such general concern.

" I reflect with unspeakable satisfaction on the steady loyalty and firm at-

the present, though he could add little more, in point of argument, to what had already been so ably and fully stated by his noble friend, he considered it as incumbent on him expressly to deliver his opinion on several points which had been urged by

tachment to the established constitution and government, which, notwithstanding the continued efforts employed to mislead and to seduce, have been so generally prevalent among all ranks of my people. These sentiments have been eminently manifested in the zeal and alacrity of the militia to provide for our internal defence, and in the distinguished bravery and spirit displayed on every occasion by my forces, both by sea and land: they have maintained the lustre of the British name, and have shewn themselves worthy of the blessings which it is the object of all our exertions to preserve."

"*Gentlemen of the House of Commons,*

"I have ordered the necessary estimates and accounts to be laid before you, and I am persuaded you will be ready to make such provision as the exigencies of the time may require. I feel too sensibly the repeated proofs which I hare received of the affection of my subjects, not to lament the necessity of any additional burdens. It is, however, a great consolation to me to observe the favourable state of the revenue, and the complete success of the measure which was last year adopted for removing the embarrassments affecting commercial credit.

"Great as must be the extent of our exertions, I trust you will be enabled to provide for them in such a manner, as to avoid any pressure which could be severely felt by my people."

"*My Lords and Gentlemen,*

"In all your deliberations, you will undoubtedly bear in mind the true grounds and origin of the war.

"An attack was made on us, and on our allies, founded on principles which tend to destroy all property, to subvert the laws and religion of every civilized nation, and to introduce universally that wild and destructive system of rapine, anarchy, and impiety, the effects of which, as they have already been manifested in France, furnish a dreadful but useful lesson to the present age and to posterity.

"It only remains for us to persevere in our united exertions; their discontinuance or relaxation could hardly procure even a short interval of delusive repose, and could never terminate in security or peace. Impressed with the necessity of defending all that is most dear to us, and relying, as we may, with confidence, on the valour and resources of the nation, on the combined efforts of so large a part of Europe, and, above all, on the incontestable justice of our cause, let us render our conduct a contrast to that of our enemies, and, by cultivating and practising the principles of humanity,

the right honourable gentleman. He still considered it as necessary, in the present stage of the question, to refer to the original grounds upon which the war had been undertaken. The honourable gentleman on the other side had told them that these were of little consequence; and had insisted, that a secure and honourable termination of the war, was the only point which ought now to occupy their discussion. But it became more necessary to refer to these original grounds, as, while the present system continued, there was no probability of any such termination in the present moment.

In recurring then to the principles on which they set out, it would appear that the present war had not been hastily and rashly engaged in, but after due deliberation and mature conviction. It had been the opinion of the majority of that house, and of the great body of the nation, that it was undertaken upon grounds strictly defensive; and that the nation were equally compelled to engage in it by the obligations of duty, and the urgency of necessity. An honourable gentleman had asked—Would not we have engaged in the war, even if France had not previously declared against us? To this he would answer, what he had last session asserted, That if we did not receive satisfaction for past injuries, and security with respect to the future, most certainly we would. From the conduct of France, the war, in whatever form it appeared, could only be considered as aggressive on their part. As to what were the objects of the war, in the first instance, they had frequently been brought forward in the course of last session, and had again, in the present debate, been stated by his noble friend. These objects were—First, that the system adopted by the French had developed principles destructive to the general order of society, and subversive of all regular government. Secondly, that the French themselves, with a view, no doubt, of extending their system, had been guilty of usurpations of the territory of other states. Thirdly, that

and the duties of religion, endeavour to merit the continuance of the Divine favour and protection which have been so eminently experienced by these kingdoms."

they had discovered hostile intentions against Holland. Fourthly, that they had disclosed views of aggrandizement and ambition entirely new in extent and importance, and menacing, in their progress, not only the independence of this country, but the security of Europe.—Unless it could be shewn, that we were originally mistaken; that these were not proper objects of contest; or that these objects were already gained; the obligations and necessity which originally induced us to undertake the war, would operate with equal force at the present moment. In that case, even supposing that disappointment and difficulty had occurred in the prosecution of the war, they ought to have no other effect than to inspire us with additional vigour, and stimulate us to new exertions. Though not insensible to any failure or miscarriage that might be ascribed to the misconduct of those employed in conducting the operations of the war, yet these could not at all effect the general question, even if their conduct had as much demerit as had been stated by the honourable gentleman on the other side. However unpleasant he or his colleagues might feel from that peculiar situation of responsibility in which they stood, that was no reason why there should be any alteration in the sentiments of the country. If those disappointments and difficulties arose, not from the nature of the contest, but from the misconduct of those entrusted with the management of public affairs, the nation were not therefore to be discouraged in the career of exertion, and to shrink from the discharge of their duty. If those persons who conducted his Majesty's councils were unequal to the task, let us not think so meanly of the abilities of the country, as to suppose that there are not others of superior talents, without resorting to the few individuals who have ever since its commencement discovered principles inimical to the war. Surely it was not necessary to suppose that all the abilities of the nation were exclusively monopolized by those individuals. But if, on the other hand, the difficulty was ascribed to the nature of the contest itself, which, however, he should much more regret, then would the argument with respect to the misconduct of ministers, or of those

concerned in conducting the active operations of the war, be much weakened.

He would now, he said, proceed briefly to take a view of the different stages in which the question of the war had been debated. At the conclusion of last session, he had placed its termination upon two circumstances; first, the being able to procure a peace upon terms likely to render it secure and permanent; and, secondly, an indemnity suitable to the expense which the nation should have incurred in carrying on the war. He had therefore, in the debate at the conclusion of last session, held out as a means, not only of annoying the enemy, but of securing those desirable ends, the propriety of an interference in the internal government of France. Not that he had absolutely insisted upon an entire subversion of that government; he had always asserted that if a peace could be made upon terms of security to this country, no consideration of the detestable characters of the ruling men in France, or of the crimes and horrors with which they were sullied, ought to influence this country to reject such terms.

The honourable gentleman had at that time admitted this principle to be right, both in point of expediency and morality. And here he must advert to an unfair mode of argument which had been employed by the honourable gentleman. He had endeavoured to give a different turn to sentiments, by confounding the periods at which they were brought forward.—When the strict neutrality observed by this country, with respect to France, had been mentioned in his Majesty's speech, no injury had then been received from France. When circumstances altered, the same sentiments could no longer apply. If a foreign country, divided into two parties, discovered hostile intentions with respect to a nation, it would surely be perfectly fair in that nation to endeavour to oppose those parties to one another; more especially if the continuance of a system was the ground of that enmity, an interference to destroy that system was particularly justifiable. Such was the precise state of the case between France and this country. Last year this interference had

been avowed and admitted as a ground of action, and its propriety could not surely be now denied. Since last year, a new scene had presented itself, more eventful and extraordinary even than those which had formerly been exhibited. However the horrors and crimes which had taken place in former periods of the revolution might have exceeded all expectation, and transcended even the utmost stretch of imagination, they now appeared only to have paved the way for fresh horrors and accumulated crimes, beyond whatever fancy could have feigned, or fear conceived. Things had now come to such a crisis, that he had no difficulty to declare, that, while that system continued, peace was less desirable to him than a war, under any circumstances of disaster which he could possibly imagine. Not that he would contend that the mere abhorrence of crimes, that the mere detestation of character, except directly bearing upon our own safety, could constitute any reasons why we should engage in a war; but, in the present instance, the reasoning of his noble friend directly applied. That reasoning had gone—first, to shew the horror and enormity of the system which now prevailed in France: secondly, the danger of the extension of that system, if not speedily and effectually resisted: thirdly, the measures which were employed for the purpose of extending that system: fourthly, the prospects of success which we derived from the very nature of those measures, in our attempts to crush the progress of that system: and fifthly, that the success of those attempts depended upon the vigorous continuance of our warlike efforts; and that the circumstances of the case were such, as, in the present moment, entirely precluded all negociation. The speech of his noble friend had been styled declamatory; upon what principle he knew not, except that every effort of eloquence, in which the most forcible reasoning was adorned and supported by all the powers of language, was to be branded with the epithet of declamation. The propositions which he had brought forward, had been urged, not in a vague and general way—they had been supported by strong facts.

The history of the rulers of France had been taken from their

own mouths, from records written under their inspection, and decrees sanctioned by their authority. From the nature of their government, there could be no dependence on the characters of whom it was composed. The shifting of persons took place like the shifting of scenes; but this change of persons produced no alteration in the conduct of the drama, the principles and proceedings still continued the same, or were distinguished in their progress only by increasing gradations of enormity. On the 21st of May, a new government, more dreadful in its character, and more fatal in its effects, than any which preceded it, had taken place—This was the revolutionary government.

My noble friend began, continued Mr. Pitt, by stating, that one of the leading features of this government was the abolition of religion. It will scarcely be maintained that this step could tend only to affect opinions, and have no influence upon the conduct of a nation. The extinction of religious sentiment was only intended to pave the way for the introduction of fresh crimes, and entirely to break asunder those bands of society which had been already loosened. It was intended only to familiarize the mind with guilt, and, by removing the obstacle of fear, to relieve it from the restraints of conscience. Infidelity, as my noble friend remarked, was only meant to go hand in hand with insurrection. A second measure of this revolutionary government was the destruction of property, a precedent which tended not less to destroy all ideas of justice, than the former to extinguish all sentiments of piety. Not less detestable was their conduct in their mode of inflicting punishments—a mode which took away from the accused all privilege of defence, and from their trials even the appearance of legal forms. All these crimes, however, they contrived to convert into sources of revenue. From the pillage of the churches—from the destruction of property—from the confiscation of the effects of those who were condemned—they derived the means for conducting their military operations. They pushed every resource to its utmost extent; as, for instance, the unbounded circulation of assignats, and the imposition of a forced loan. What can be expected

from a system of acting upon such principles, and supported by such resources? Resources so desperate afford in themselves the most certain symptoms and indications of the approaching decay of that system with which they are connected. If, then, such be the system, if such the means of its support; and if France in consequence has, during these few months, experienced a degree of distress; the greatest, perhaps, ever known in that country during the same space of time; what prospect can there be of either stability or permanence to the present order of things? Can it be supposed to rest on that something approaching to instinct—that spirit of enthusiasm which has been so highly extolled by the gentlemen on the other side? What can we think of the probability of the duration of a system which has sent as many suspected persons to the prison or scaffold, as it has sent recruits to the field?

But it has been urged, that the French have distinguished themselves in the field; nor will it be denied, that, independently of any other circumstance, the spirit of a people called forth by the impulse which acts so strongly in such a situation, may have the effect to make them brave in the moment of action. But their efforts are merely the result of a system of restraint and oppression, the most terrible and gigantic that has, perhaps, ever existed. They are compelled into the field by the terror of the *guillotine*—they are supported there only by those resources which their desperate situation affords; and, in these circumstances, what can be the dependence on the steadiness of their operations, or what rational prospect can there be of the permanence of their exertions? On this ground, the more monstrous and terrible the system has become, the greater is the probability that it will be speedily overthrown. From the nature of the mind of man, and the necessary progress of human affairs, it is impossible that such a system can be of long duration; and surely no event can be looked for more desirable than a destruction of that system which at present exists, to the misery of France and the terror of Europe.

As to the question of the honourable gentleman, whether I

am never to make peace with the jacobins, it is extremely difficult to answer, and it would be neither prudent nor rational in me to give him any definitive reply in the present moment. It is a question, the solution of which must depend upon a combination of events. As circumstances may vary, a different line of conduct must necessarily be pursued; nor would it be proper to bind up my discretion to act with a regard to those contingencies that may arise, by pledging myself at present to one set of measures. In the present circumstances, I have no hesitation to declare, that I would rather choose to persevere in the war, even amidst the worst disasters, and should deem such a conduct much more safe and honourable, than to conclude a peace with the ruling powers in France on their present system. The question of pursuing the war must, in every instance, depend upon the convenience with which it can be carried on to ourselves; and of that you must be best qualified to judge. On this great and interesting crisis, I have no hesitation to state, that I should think myself deficient in point of candour, if I did not most unequivocally declare, that the moment will never come, when I shall not think any alternative preferable to that of making peace with France, upon the system of its present rulers. The question I do not now mean to argue at large, both from the very advanced hour, and from the full discussion which it has already received. I shall only touch on one or two points which have been brought forward by the honourable gentleman in the course of his argument. His motion is certainly couched in very general terms, and such as might take in every thing that I have contended for. It recommends to his Majesty to conclude a peace whenever it can be done upon safe and advantageous terms, without any reference to the nature and form of government which may exist in France. I likewise am of opinion, that a safe and advantageous peace ought to be concluded; but that the security and benefits of that peace must depend upon the establishment of a government essentially different from the present. Though the motion, however, from the general terms in which it is expressed, is calculated to

gain no precise object, it is yet capable of doing much mischief. It means and says, that this house entertains sentiments different from those expressed by his Majesty in his speech. It holds out to our allies that they are no longer to consider us as eager in the cause, or acting upon the principles in which we embarked along with them; while it must impart encouragement and confidence to our enemies.

The honourable gentleman has said, that a treaty with the French government would afford us as good a security for the continuance of peace, as that which we derived from the treaty of Ryswick or Utrecht. He then, in his usual way, entered into a declamation against kings, and said that we might place equal dependence on the good faith of the present government of France, as on that of the court of Louis XIV. This I expressly deny; and I affirm, that had that king even succeeded in his ambitious projects to their full extent, what we should then have suffered might have been considered as a deliverance, compared with what must be the consequence of success attending the present French system. All the splendour of his court, all the abilities of his generals and discipline of his armies, all the great exertions which he was enabled to make, proceeded from a high sentiment of honour. The exercise of that power which he possessed, however directed to the purposes of his ambition, was regulated by certain principles, and limited within certain bounds. No such principles actuate the conduct of the present French rulers. They have contrived to banish all restraints, and, with an ambition more insatiable, they have at their disposal means of destruction much more formidable than that monarch ever possessed in the plenitude of his power.

The honourable gentleman has inaccurately stated, that I attach the same degree of importance to the restoration of monarchy in France, as to the destruction of the present system. This is by no means the case: I attach importance to the restoration of monarchy, from an opinion that, in the present state of France, some settled form should take place, in which the greater part of the people may be disposed to concur. The ancient govern-

ment I consider as affording the best materials upon which they could work, in introducing any change into the fabric of their constitution. Besides, as I have thought it incumbent, in any interference which I proposed, in the internal affairs of that oountry, to consult chiefly the happiness of the people, monarchy appeared to me the system most friendly to their true interests. In another respect, the honourable gentleman has misrepresented me, by stating the restitution of monarchy as an event which must necessarily be preceded by the conquest of France. I consider monarchy only as the standard under which the people of France might be united, the more especially as it is that form of government which my noble friend has proved to be most agreeable to the wishes of two-thirds of the inhabitants. But it has been said, that even the re-establishment of royalty would afford us no additional security for the permanence of peace, and that the French would still be equally formidable to this country. It is, however, surely a wild and extravagant assertion, that the monarchy of France, stripped as it would then be of much of its power, and diminished in its revenues, should be as formidable as a system which has proved itself to be more dangerous than monarchy ever was, in the plenitude of its power and the height of its greatness.

But there is one part of the argument of my noble friend to which I must particularly call your attention, and which, independently of every other consideration, precludes even the possibility of our treating with France in the present moment. A decree has been passed by the convention, forbidding to treat with any enemy till they shall have evacuated the territories of the republic; and on the 11th of April it was again decreed, that those persons should be punished with death who should propose to treat with any power which should not have previously acknowledged the independence of the French nation, and the unity and indivisibility of the republic, founded upon liberty and equality. Thus, by any proposal to treat, we should not only incur the disgrace of the most abject humiliation, but absolutely put ourselves at their mercy, and subject ourselves

to the necessity of receiving any terms which they might be disposed to dictate. Are you then to withdraw your armies, to deprive yourself of the co-operation of your allies, to forego all your acquisitions, to give up Condé, Quesnoi, Tobago, Fort Louis, all the factories in the East Indies? Are you to abandon all these acquisitions, the rewards of your past labours, and the pledges of your future success? Should you consent to do all this, should you even hasten to send an ambassador to treat with the convention, (and the right honourable gentleman * I believe on a former occasion volunteered himself for that service,) you not only must acknowledge the unity and indivisibility of the French republic, but you must do so in their own way. You must acknowledge it as founded on liberty and equality. You must subscribe to the whole of their code, and by this act sanction the deposition of their sovereign, and the annihilation of their legislature. It may be said that they would not insist upon all this to its full extent; but of this I can have but little confidence, when I compare their past declarations and their conduct. To whatever pitch of extravagance they may have reached in what they have said, they have always outstript it by what they have done. The absurdity of their expressions has in every instance been surpassed by the outrages of their conduct; nor can we have any hopes of more moderation from any change of parties. In all revolutions that have hitherto taken place, the first recommendation to favour has been hostility to England. The most violent party have always predominated. The leading feature in their character at present is a spirit of military enterprise, exerted, not for the purposes of ambition, but every where spreading, in its progress, terror and desolation. We are called in the present age to witness the political and moral phenomenon of a mighty and civilized people, formed into an artificial horde of banditti, throwing off all the restraints which have influenced men in social life, displaying a savage valour directed by a sanguinary spirit, forming apine and destruction into a system, and perverting to their de-

* Mr. Fox.

testable purposes, all the talents and ingenuity which they derived from their advanced stage of civilization, all the refinements of art, and the discoveries of science. We behold them uniting the utmost savageness and ferocity of design with consummate contrivance, and skill in execution, and seemingly engaged in no less than a conspiracy to exterminate from the face of the earth all honour, humanity, justice, and religion. In this state, can there be any question but to resist, where resistance alone can be effectual, till such time, as, by the blessing of Providence upon our endeavours, we shall have secured the independence of this country, and the general interests of Europe?

It cannot be doubted, that there are many other points brought forward by the honourable gentleman with respect to the conduct of the campaign, and the treatment of neutral powers, which I am extremely anxious to meet, but into which the lateness of the hour forbids me to enter. My own strength, as well as the patience of the house, is already exhausted; and I the more willingly postpone them on the present occasion, as they will, with more propriety, form future and separate subjects of discussion.

The amendment was negatived:

Ayes 59
Noes 277

And the question on the address was afterwards put and agreed to.

May 16, 1794.

A message from his Majesty having been delivered to the House on the 12th instant, informing them, "that seditious practices to an alarming extent had been carried on by certain societies in London, in correspondence with societies in different parts of the country, tending to subvert the laws and constitution of the kingdom, and introductory of the system of anarchy prevailing in France; and recommending to the House to adopt such measures as might appear necessary;" and the books and papers of the said so-

cieties having been in consequence laid before the House, and referred by them to a committee of secrecy;—the report of this committee was this day brought up.

On its being read by the clerk at the table, Mr. PITT rose:

He said, the committee of secrecy had formed their opinion on the papers submitted to their examination with the greatest expedition, and their report stated so fully and particularly those circumstances, which in the judgment of the committee required the immediate attention of parliament, that he felt it hardly necessary for him to do more than shortly to recapitulate the different objects to which that report applied, and the various particulars which came under their consideration. Gentlemen would perceive that that report, so expeditiously laid before the house, contained a general view of the transactions referred to the committee, without waiting for a more minute investigation, and was shortly this:—that it appeared to them that a plan had been digested and acted upon, and at that moment was in forwardness towards its execution, the object of which was nothing less than to assemble a pretended convention of the people, for the purposes of assuming to itself the character of a general representation of the nation; superseding, in the first place, the representative capacity of that house, and arrogating, in the next place, the legislative power of the country at large. It would be for the house to consider whether the circumstances contained in the report, impressed their minds with the same conviction with which they had impressed the minds of the committee. If they did, he could not have a doubt but that they would lead to the same practical conclusion, namely, that, if such designs existed, if such designs had been acted upon and were in forwardness, there was not one moment to be lost in arming the executive power with those additional means, which might be sufficient effectually to stop the further progress of such a plan, and to prevent its being carried into final execution.

It was chiefly necessary for the house, in considering the report, to recollect, that a great part of it was merely intro-

ductory; and that, though it stated transactions of a date long antecedent to the period in which the acts of the societies implicated had assumed the serious aspect of practical treason, and though they were of notorious publicity, it was nevertheless necessary to bring them forward again to observation, to give a clue to unravel the complicated circumstances of the plan, and, by comparison and combination of them with the subsequent proceedings of the individuals concerned, to shew, that from the beginning their views were the same, and that the pretext of reform, under which they masked their purpose, was far from being the true object of their intentions. The house would also carry along with them, that the committee, having been stinted in point of time, had not been able to digest methodically, or point out distinctly, the various minute parts that formed the great and momentous business before them. In order to give the house, however, as soon as possible, possession of so much of it as might serve to point out the daily and increasing approximation of danger, the committee, in examining and making up the report, had kept in view the great object, the leading design of the plan: for it was not to be imagined, that the distance of the transactions in point of time, and the fact of their being previously known, made them the less material as comments on those parts of their conduct which were discovered in their full maturity.

It would be seen by the report, that the papers found, as far as related to that part of the conspiracy which immediately implicated the Corresponding Society, and that for constitutional information, contained two years' correspondence with various other societies in this and a neighbouring country, and from these, coupled with their subsequent and more recent proceedings, it was evident that those societies, which would be found to be now setting on foot a convention, had had such a measure in contemplation from the very outset; that it was conceived so long ago as two years back; was openly avowed in their correspondence, but kept in reserve to be reduced to practice as soon as a seasonable occasion should offer. This whole system of

insurrection would appear, from the papers found with them, to be laid in the modern doctrine of the rights of man;—that monstrous doctrine, under which the weak and ignorant, who are most susceptible of impression from such barren abstract positions, were attempted to be seduced to overturn government, law, property, security, religion, order, and every thing valuable in this country, as men acting upon the same ideas had already overturned and destroyed every thing in France, and disturbed the peace and endangered the safety, if not the existence, of every nation in Europe However gentlemen might ground arguments against the cautionary measures taken to prevent the evil effects of that pernicious doctrine, on the contemptible situation of the authors, and the absurdity of the principles of those books in which it was inculcated, yet, allowing the one to be in the extreme as contemptible as the others were absurd, it was no light or trivial circumstance, when, deduced from it, alarming principles were promulgated and eagerly adopted by large bodies; and when the proceedings of all those jacobin societies would appear (as the papers before the house fully demonstrated) to be only comments on that text;—a text for the inculcation of which those societies were the disciples here, as their corresponding French brethren were the instruments for disseminating it in France, and extending it by carnage and slaughter to all other parts of Europe.

It would appear, that, prior to the enormities committed in France, a correspondence had been carried on between those societies and the jacobin club in Paris, and that delegates were sent from them to the national convention, and received formally by that assembly; and that, at the very moment when the jacobin faction which usurped the government of that country had commenced hostilities against Great Britain, those societies still, as far as they could, had pursued the same conduct, expressed the same attachment to their cause, adopted their appellations, forms of proceeding and language, and, in short, had formed a settled design to disseminate the same principles, and sow the same seeds of ruin, in their own country. It would be

found, not only that the most effectual plans which cunning could devise, had been laid to carry this design into practice, but in the report would be seen a statement of the catalogue of manufacturing towns marked out, as the most likely (from the vast concourse of ignorant and profligate men who necessarily collect in such places) to adopt their plans, and corresponding societies established there, to keep up the chain of seditious intercourse, and promulgate and give it universal circulation. Gentlemen would find in that catalogue a well-chosen selection of the places where those people dwell, who must be naturally supposed most ready to rise at the call of insurrection; who were most likely to be blinded by their artifices, and prejudiced by professions; whose understandings were most subject to be misled by their doctrines, and rendered subservient to their views, and whom fraudful persuasion, proneness to discontent, and the visionary and fallacious hope of mending their condition by any alteration of it whatever, would be most likely to congregate into an enormous torrent of insurrection, which would sweep away all the barriers of government, law, and religion, and leave our country a naked waste for usurped authority to range in, uncontrolled and unresisted.

In considering this subject, the house could not but remark the extraordinary manner in which those societies had varied their plans of operation; sometimes acting in undisguised audacious hostility, sometimes putting on the mask of attachment to the state and country; one day openly avowing their intentions, as if purposely to provoke the hand of justice; the next, putting on the mask of reform, and affecting the utmost zeal for the preservation of the constitution. In their letter to the society at Norwich, would be seen a plain avowal of their object, an *apology for deigning to apply to parliament;* and a candid, sincere confession, that, not to the parliament, not to the executive power were they to look for redress, but to the convention which they proposed to erect, and to themselves: afterwards they recommended persevering in petitioning for reform to be used as a mask to their designs, which they were to throw off when time

served, and a period propitious to their views should arrive. Happily for this country, and for the whole world, they had prematurely thought that period at hand, and thrown off the mask just when the bulk of the nation unanimously were uniting with government in vigilance and care for its protection, and in the resolution to oppose their efforts.

By a due attention to the correspondence of that society, the house would find, in their communication with the British convention at Edinburgh, which still retained some flimsy remnant of that disguise, some remains of that hypocrisy assumed to hide those designs which, though not publicly declared, too obviously appeared, that they styled this convention the representatives of the people, clothed in all the right to reform, and send delegates to it; and, when some of the most mischievous and active of its members fell under sentence of the law, that they boldly asserted their innocence, nay their merits, directly in the teeth of that law, paid every tribute of enthusiastic applause to the persons convicted by the verdict of juries legally constituted, and of respect to the convention, pronouncing them objects of panegyric and envy. In conformity to their prior declarations, and to the plans of insurrection laid by them, they made the legal condemnation of those guilty persons the signal, as they styled it, of *coming to issue* on the point, "Whether the law should frighten them into compliance, or they oppose it with its own weapons, to wit, force and power!" that is to say distinctly, Whether they should yield obedience to the laws of their country, or oppose them by insurrection? That was avowed in as plain and marked language as man could possibly conceive. He thought that that case, so circumstanced, and supported by such a variety of coincident matter, was as strong a case as the mind of man could well imagine; yet, singular though it might appear, all this was but introductory to facts of a still stronger nature which were to follow. He should call the attention of the house to the history of a society which, despicable and contemptible though the persons who composed it were, as to talents, education, and influence, yet when looked at with cautious attention, and com-

pared with the objects they had in view, and the motives on which they acted, namely, that great moving principle of all jacobinism, the love of plunder, devastation, and robbery, which now bore the usurped name of liberty, and that system of butchery and carnage which had been made the instrument of enforcing those principles, would appear to be formidable in exact proportion to the meanness and contemptibility of their characters. Of that society the characteristic was, that, being composed of the lower orders of people, it had within it the means of unbounded extension, and concealed in itself the seeds of rapid increase. It had risen already to no less than thirty divisions in London, some of those containing as many as six hundred persons, and was connected by a systematical chain of correspondence with other societies scattered through all the manufacturing towns where the seeds of those principles were laid, which artful and dangerous people might best convert to their own purposes. It would appear in proof, that that society had risen to an enormous height of boldness, and erected in itself, in express terms, a power to watch over the progress of parliament, to scan its proceedings, and prescribe limits for its actions; beyond which if it presumed to advance, that august society was to issue its mandate, not only to controvert that act, but to put an end to the existence of parliament itself: so that, if the parliament should think it necessary to oppose, by any act of penal coercion, the ruin of the constitution, that would be the war-whoop for insurrection; the means of our defence would become the signal for attack, and the parliament be made the instrument of its own annihilation. Such language as this, coming from people apparently so contemptible in talents, so mean in their description, and so circumscribed in their power, would, abstractedly considered, be supposed to deserve compassion, as the wildest workings of insanity; but the researches of the committee would tend to prove, that it had been the result of deep design, matured, moulded into shape, and fit for mischievous effect when opportunity should offer.

About six weeks since, there had arisen a new era in this his-

tory of insurrection, in which the house might contemplate those great machines of jacobinism, the societies alluded to in the report. At that period the Corresponding Society had laid, in due form, before the society for constitutional information, a deliberate and deep-concerted plan for actually assembling a convention for all England, not to be the representatives of these particular bodies for the accomplishment of particular legal purposes, but to be the representatives of the whole body of the people of England, and evidently to exercise legislative and judicial capacities, to overturn the established system of government, and wrest from the parliament that power which the people and the constitution had lodged in their hands. Within a few weeks the plan was fixed upon to be carried into execution, and in their circular letter they precisely and emphatically stated, that *no time was to be lost;* and lest, by any possibility, their ruinous intentions should be misunderstood, the letter was addressed equally to all parts of the island, and circulated with a share of vigour, cunning, and address, truly astonishing. It contained also a declaration that a central spot was fixed upon, which they would not venture to name till they had assurances of the fidelity of those to whom they were to disclose it; which central spot they chose, as they themselves asserted, for the purpose of having with greater facility the delegates of the whole island present when they assembled; and they particularly desired each separate society to send an exact account of the number of its members, friends, and adherents, in order to estimate their force. Of this they informed the society for constitutional information, in a letter, accompanied with a set of resolutions.

It might be objected that men of the description which he had stated, could not be expected to act so consistently, and under such well-managed disguise; but when, on inspection, it appeared that their plans had been carried on with a degree of cunning and management that greater men in worthier causes had failed in manifesting, that objection could have no weight when opposed to evidence thus incontrovertible. Who was there that

knew what jacobins and jacobin principles were, but must see, in the pretences of reform in parliament held out by these societies, the arrogant claims of the same class of men as those who lorded it in France, to trample upon the rich, and crush every description of men, women, and children; the dark designs of a few, making use of the name of the people to govern all: a plan founded in the arrogance of wretches, the outcasts of society, tending to enrich themselves, by depriving of property, and of life, all those who were distinguished either for personal worth, or for opulence?—a plan which had been long felt by the unfortunate people of France in all its aggravated horrors, and which, he feared, would long, very long, continue to be felt by that ill-fated country.

From the period he had mentioned, they had acted upon that horrible plan; and subsequently (on the 14th of April) the house would find a meeting of the society, their proceedings in which meeting, carried with them no faint illustration of what they might be expected to do in the full majesty of power. There would be found resolutions arraigning every branch of the government, threatening the sovereign, insulting the house of peers, and accusing the commons of insufficiency: there would be found notice taken of the measures of parliament, which had been previously made the signals for an insurrection of the people, and declarations that certain measures, if adopted, whether with or without the consent of parliament, should be rescinded, under their doctrine, *Salus populi suprema lex*, and that the constitution had been utterly destroyed. Could there be a more explicit avowal of their views? All the materials from whence proof of these allegations was drawn, rested on their own authentic records, and on the express and unequivocal avowal of their own deliberate acts in their meditated system of insurrection. This was the essence of the subject; but if the house were of opinion, that this so deeply affected the safety and existence of parliament itself, and struck at the root of government and the constitution, as to demand interference, there were, in addition, other things which must contribute not a

little to increase the impatience of the house to baffle the views of those conspirators, and stop the final execution of their projects.

For his part, Mr. Pitt said, such was his opinion of the British constitution, that, even supposing the executive government had been guilty of every neglect of their duty in watching over its safety, and parliament had been supine under those manifestations of sedition, he conceived its enemies must nevertheless have failed of success; but, however persuaded he might be of this fact, it was still right to prevent, by timely interference, the small misery which a short struggle might necessarily produce, and to save the nation at large from the reproach, that they had seen such acts, and heard such avowals, without having adopted proper steps to check their execution, and punish those who were so wicked as to devise them. There were stated in the close of the report, on grounds not light or trivial, though not minutely entered into in the report till after fuller investigation by the committee, allegations *that arms had been actually procured and distributed by these societies*, and were in the hands of those very people whom they had been striving to corrupt: and that even now, instead of breaking up this formidable league, and disbanding and dispersing this jacobin army, they had shewn themselves immoveably bent on the pursuit of their purpose, and displayed preparations of defiance and resistance to the measures of government.

It remained for the house to consider what was to be done? and, in considering that, they would not refer to the quality of the persons, but to the nature and magnitude of the objects they had in view. It would be found, when the causes and proceedings were taken into contemplation, that so formidable a conspiracy had never before existed. The inquiry was yet far from complete, and unfit for final decision, the documents being very voluminous: but the committee had deemed it their duty to shew the house that instant precaution was necessary, and had therefore, though unable to finish the important research, laid before the house what they had yet done, which he hoped would be thought

sufficient grounds for adopting the measure he intended to propose. It had been usual, in time of danger, to enact a temporary suspension of the *Habeas Corpus* law. As that great and essential benefit to the subject had been suggested, and provided for the preservation of the constitution on the one hand, so, on the other, it could not exist if the constitution was gone. The temporary sacrifice of that law might be, on certain occasions, as necessary to the support of the constitution, as the maintenance of its principles was at all others. It had been suspended at a time when the constitution and liberty of the country were most peculiarly guarded and respected; and such a suspension was more particularly called for at this crisis, when attempts were made to disseminate through the realm, principles and means of action that might endanger that constitution, for the preservation of which that law had been made, and which might produce much more lamentable effects, and at last require a remedy greater in extent and more dreadful, than the one now proposed. This was not his opinion alone, but the sentiments of all those respectable gentlemen of the committee who had investigated the matter. He should therefore move "for leave to bring in a bill to empower his Majesty to secure and detain all such persons as should be suspected of conspiring against his person and government."

The motion was carried,

Ayes 201
Noes 39

and, after another division, on a motion made by Mr. Grey, "for a Call of the House," which was negatived, the bill was presented, read a first and second time, and voted into the committee; where its various clauses being adjusted and agreed to, the report was received, and the bill ordered to be engrossed and read a third time the next day.

May 17, 1794.

On a motion for the third reading of the bill, which had been introduced the preceding day, "for suspending the operation of the Habeas Corpus Act," the measure was strenuously opposed, particularly by Mr. Grey, Mr. Sheridan, and Mr. Fox.

Mr. PITT, in defence of the motion, observed, that from the lateness of the hour, and having but little inclination to go much at length into a question which had been already so fully discussed, it was not his intention to detain the house for any great length of time; and, indeed, the very able manner in which his honourable friends had already argued it, rendered it unnecessary for him to say much. The right honourable gentleman* commenced, and had concluded, his speech, by holding out, as an incontrovertible argument, that the measures at present necessarily adopted by administration, would impair materially, if not totally destroy, the constitution of this country; a mode of reasoning that he could never suffer to pass without a reply. Pursuing that strain of argument, the honourable gentleman had pronounced, in terms of unrivalled eloquence, a most pathetic funeral oration on the supposed departed liberties of British subjects, which he had stated as having expired with the introduction of the present bill—a bill, in his mind, nothing worse, or more dangerous in its consequence, than what had been known, from the experience and practice of our ancestors, to be a wise and proper measure, when the existing circumstances of the country demanded such a measure, and required that the hands of the executive government should be strengthened. That necessity, however difficult it might be to convince that honourable gentleman of its existence, he trusted, had been fully made out to the house, and to all those who had given themselves the trouble of bestowing the slightest consideration on the subject; and such necessity having been proved to exist, it came then to be considered, whether the danger was

* Mr. Fox.

of sufficient magnitude to justify the suspension of the *Habeas Corpus* act, which, properly speaking, was the only question for consideration before the house. That measure, he granted, was of considerable importance; it was a remedy only to be applied when the emergency was so great as really to call for it. The fair question, therefore, which gentlemen were to put to their own minds, was simply this, Whether the danger with which the constitution of the country was threatened by the practices now exposed, was, or was not, greater than any danger which could result from putting into the hands of the executive government, a more than ordinary degree of power, for the purpose of resisting what they considered, and what parliament considered, a very dangerous conspiracy? The honourable gentleman had carried his argument so far as to say, that if the bill passed, all the rights of the people, and all the privileges of parliament, would be at once destroyed—a doctrine which he could never admit, by whatever ability or eloquence it might be supported. On that point it was important for the consideration of the house, a point which had not yet been touched on by any of those who had argued the question, that the bill was limited in its duration; that it was but a temporary measure, adapted to a present existing evil, and was to continue in force for little more than six months; and that it invested the executive government with a temporary discretionary power, to imprison suspected persons for that limited time, without bringing them to trial;—all the rights of the people, and all the privileges of parliament, remaining uninterruptedly the same, attaching all the time the same responsibility upon ministers to which they were liable in every other situation in which they acted, and equally answerable for any abuse of this power, if they should abuse it, as they were for the abuse of any other discretionary power which was vested in them. Stating the question in that view, which was the real and proper state of it, could any gentleman think that all the liberties of the subject, and all the privileges of parliament, would be so completely annihilated by the bill, as to make it a question, whether a member of par-

liament ought, or ought not, to give up his attendance in parliament, or the interest of his constituents? He would not do those honourable gentlemen the injustice to suppose that any of them thought so for a moment; and it would not be doing justice to their own characters, were they to make any such declaration.

The right honourable gentleman, and those who argued on the same side with him, had contended, that in this, and other measures of government, there appeared a strong imitation of the French system of procedure: upon what grounds they knew best: hitherto they had never taken the trouble of explaining them to the house. Wherein was the comparison to be found? He begged gentlemen to attend a little to the comparative state of the two countries. Here a case had been stated, and clearly made out, proving that there was a party in this country, whose avowed system aimed at the destruction of all civilized order, the annihilation of parliament, and the subversion of the constitution, by the introduction of jacobinism, which had already proved so fatal to France, and at that moment threatened the dissolution of every established government in Europe! Such being the case in this country, it was proposed to prevent the calamitous effects of this dangerous conspiracy, by the adoption of a legal measure, limited in its duration, and which the experience and wisdom of our ancestors had approved, and found highly beneficial. What then was to be compared to this in the situation of France, under the influence of the present ruling power in that country, miscalled a government?—a power which, to support its reprobated, detestable, and presumptuous usurpation, had recourse to every stratagem that fraud, robbery, and injustice could suggest. It was, therefore, unfair to impose any such comparisons upon the house; for, in the present instance, we were doing no more than resisting French crimes, by opposing to them English principles; and between them it would not be said, there could be found the least comparison, analogy, or imitation. The right honourable gentleman had next proceeded, in the climax of his imagination, to augur consequences the most portentous, omi-

nous, and inauspicious, from the arguments of the right honourable gentleman * who sat near him; and, taking that to be the first step of the ladder which he supposed reared for the destruction of the constitution, seemed dreadfully afraid about the extent to which that reasoning might be carried; and on that point he had produced somewhat of an extraordinary kind of argument, which was, that, because all the measures which had yet been taken had proved ineffectual to check the progress of the evil they had been applied to remedy, we were not therefore to persevere in endeavouring to overcome the evil by the application of means stronger and more efficacious. But here it might be asked, whether, if those measures had not been adopted, and the vigilance of government exerted, the evils complained of might not have been much greater now than they really were? and whether, if no such steps had been taken during the last two years, we should have enjoyed the same tranquillity that had prevailed during that period? The fact was, if these measures had not been adopted, we should have been hurried much faster to the same scenes of mischief which had now been opened to our view, and from the dreadful consequences of which we had been saved by the vigilance of parliament, and the exertions of government, assisted by the prevailing opinions of the country.

The right honourable gentleman had then said, that if we dreaded all that our alarms had suggested, and found that the measures adopted last year had not succeeded in checking those parties, we ought not to persevere by more severe measures, when there was reason to think that such measures had been of little avail, and that those of a cooler and more moderate nature would have been more adequate: but to what did the right honourable gentleman mean to apply those mild and moderate remedies? Did he suppose that the progress of a jacobin convention, were it to be once established in this country, was to be stopped, and its consequences avoided by indulgence and con-

* Mr. Windham.

cession? or that indulgence and concession were fit to be applied as a remedy to so daring an attempt upon the existence of the constitution? He might wish to preserve the British constitution, but that would be a thing impossible, if these societies met with indulgence or concession. Their own language clearly expressed, that they would make no compromise; and it must be clear that no concession would satisfy them, short of a surrender of the British constitution. It must therefore appear that resistance, and the strongest resistance that could be made, was absolutely necessary, notwithstanding all that had been augured in so prophetic a strain against the adoption of severe measures, even in extreme cases. The right honourable gentleman had said, "if there are such persons, to be sure you cannot like them; but never imagine that persecution will get the better of their opinions, whatever they may be." If such toleration of opinions ought to be granted to persons of the description which the members of those societies proved to be, to what did it amount? It amounted to a toleration of the worst species of anarchy, sedition, and treason In his idea of persecuting for political opinions, the right honourable gentleman need not suppose that there was any particular intention, by that bill, to go too great a length in that way; and, once for all, to answer the question of "where are you to stop?" it was not proper that the limit of their remedies should be ever declared, or that they should pronounce that this was the last remedy to which they would have recourse: he would at the same time say, that prosecution, in no instance, ought to extend beyond what the real necessity of the case required: and the temporary means proposed by the present bill might be supposed the best remedy in the present case.

Mr. Pitt said, he should next come to those points on which the right honourable gentleman seemed to have argued at a much greater length than he thought necessary, viz. the degree of necessity that existed, the proofs of that necessity, and the nature of the remedy applied to the case. Upon these several points, he conceived, the house was already perfectly satisfied; and he

could see no reason why the right honourable gentleman should have introduced into that part of his speech, so much in favour of the right which the people had to meet for legal purposes in a constitutional way, or their right to petition parliament for a reform in the representation, because these were points which had never been disputed, and had no connexion whatever with the question before the house. With regard to the policy of such an application to parliament, when that question came regularly before the house last year, he had fully declared his sentiments on that subject, and on a parliamentary reform, and his opinions still remained the same: but surely, no person would presume to say, that there existed the most remote analogy between legal societies for obtaining reform in parliament, with an intention and desire legally and constitutionally to improve the representation, and that convention proposed by the jacobin societies, whose object was the destruction of parliament, and not its improvement. That that was their design, was clearly proved by the authority of their own records: the bulk of them did not even pretend that reform was either their view or their wish; such a measure was neither in their mouths, nor in their minds; neither did their actions in any sort correspond with the actions of men who wished well to their country. To give any sanction to them, under the impression that their object was a legal and constitutional reform, was too ridiculous an idea to admit even of a moment's consideration: as well might they talk of giving their sanction to legal conspiracy and legal assassination, as imagine that those societies had any legal or virtuous purpose whatever in their system! [To corroborate this argument, the Chancellor of the Exchequer read various extracts from the proceedings of the Society for Constitutional Information, and the London Corresponding Society.] These societies were, he said, the main springs of this destructive system, which called aloud for such immediate and such powerful resistance. What he had read from their own books, proved sufficiently, in his mind, that it was through hypocrisy they pretended their object was a parliamentary reform, and that they used

it merely as a pretext or mask for their real and mischievous designs; and the papers inserted in their report were, in his opinion, a full and complete answer to such gentlemen as endeavoured to confound those men with parliamentary reformers, and served also to refute the charge made by those who had insisted that the report contained no new matter whatever. In one of their proceedings they appointed a committee for the express purpose of watching over the conduct of parliament, with a view to control any proceeding which might appear to them improper; and that they were to effect through the organ of a convention, expressing at the same time, that as no redress of grievances could be expected from that quarter, it became their duty to repel tyranny by the same means by which it was supported. On that point he could not but express his surprise at hearing the same arguments used by that right honourable gentleman which had been used on a former night, respecting the right which existed in the people at large to watch over the proceedings of parliament, and to interfere when any measure was going forward which they might conceive inimical to their interests. What most astonished him was, that any argument of that sort should be offered as a palliation for the conduct of that society; since, after the union with the other in the same system, and for the same objects, they avowedly came to resolutions, that they should not appeal to parliament for redress of their supposed grievances, but were to proceed to acts of authority and control over the functions of parliament.

With regard to nothing new being contained in the report, it was in itself a matter of indifference, whether the information contained in it was old or new, provided it was considered to substantiate the grounds upon which the alarm had taken place. However, in point of fact, they were not old proofs which it contained; for, until the seizure of the papers, the correspondence with the club at Norwich was never known; and that was one of the most important discoveries that those papers contained, as it had brought to light the general design of assembling their jacobin convention. As to what was known two

years ago, could any person say, that these transactions were unconnected with the subsequent and progressive proceedings of those societies, and that they did not form a very material link of that chain of conduct which it was necessary to trace from its first commencement down to the present moment? One part of the report, however, the right honourable gentleman had admitted to be new; that which stated that these societies were preparing to put arms into the hands of those who were to carry their designs into execution. That article of the report had been somewhat curiously objected to, that, not being in the body of the report, but given as a separate article, it was therefore less authentic. In answer to which he should mention, that that piece of information was cautiously given, because the committee, at the time their report was made up, had not been able to make so full an inquiry into that matter as the importance of the subject demanded; they, however, were now convinced, that they would very soon be in possession of such information as might lead them to propose to parliament some further measures on that article. Another reason they had for making it a separate article, was, that the full information contained in the report respecting the intended convention, was in their minds sufficient to warrant the proceedings intended to be founded thereon.

As to the propriety of the remedy, without again recurring to the arguments used against persecution for matters of opinion, he would shortly say, the remedy amounted to nothing else than putting a legal restraint upon criminal actions; and the present crime amounted, in his opinion, to a conspiracy of that nature, which was an equal, if not a stronger, reason for the suspension of the *Habeas Corpus* act, than either the cases of invasion or rebellion, to which gentlemen had so frequently alluded. The right honourable gentleman seemed very much to doubt the good effects of the bill, and that it would never attain the object for which it was intended: the opinion of the persons who composed those societies seemed to differ essentially from his, and they considered it in a different point of

view; for they had declared the the suspension of the *Habeas Corpus* act the very measure which should be the signal for them to assemble their convention, and on that account it became the more necessary for parliament to pass the bill quickly, to prevent them from taking measures to evade its operation.

With regard to the measure being likely to invite the French to invade us, the right honourable gentleman had spoken nobly and boldly on that head, when he said, that he did not fear an invasion, but would not invite one; and in that sentiment he perfectly concurred: but the material difference between them was, that he believed the effect on the French would be quite the reverse from what he supposed, for certainly the suppression of our enemies at home would be no very welcome intelligence to our enemies abroad. But however that might be, with regard to the disaffected persons in this country, whatever their numbers were, it was proper the vigilant exertions of government should equal their activity.

The House divided on Mr. Jekyll's motion of adjournment; which being rejected,

Ayes 33
Noes 183

the bill was read a third time, and passed*.

May 30, 1794.

Mr. Fox, pursuant to the notice he had given, this day submitted to the House a series of resolutions, (fourteen in number) reviewing the past proceedings of the war, and setting forth the measures that ought instantly to be adopted for promoting, on equitable and moderate conditions, a pacification with France.

Mr. Sheridan, in supporting these resolutions, took occasion to comment, in very severe terms, upon the conduct of Administration. He charged them with being the authors of a system of alarm calculated to deceive and insnare the people, and maintained that the traitorous designs, which had been pointed

* This debate, which was conducted with unusual warmth, lasted till three o'clock the following morning (Sunday).

as in the report of the Secret Committee, were fabulous plots and forged conspiracies, originating solely in the foul imagination of his Majesty's Ministers.

Mr. Pitt:—

I do not feel it necessary, on the present occasion, or in the present stage of the debate, to trouble the house for any length of time, for the same reason that I had, in the first instance, conceived that it would be unnecessary for me to trouble them at all. The substance of the question, and of the arguments brought in support of it, is, as was stated by the right honourable mover of the resolutions, certainly old. The honourable gentleman*, however, who spoke last, has contrived to introduce a considerable deal of novelty into the latter part of his speech. I will not say that the matter which he thus introduced, was not connected with the question: had it not been connected with the question, you, Sir, would undoubtedly have called him to order. I could easily, however, account for the principle on which you were restrained from doing so, when I recollect that on a former occasion you stated, that any argument, however bad or absurd, does not therefore become disorderly. It is possible that an argument may have some connexion, though it be not such as can evidently be received in the first instance, and certainly it will be allowed, with respect to the honourable gentleman, that he is possessed of such ingenuity as to bring together every argument, however incongruous, that may suit his purpose, and give it an appearance of connexion with the question. What then was the amount of his arguments? That you ought to discontinue the war, because it afforded the means of fabricating plots in this country. The honourable gentleman thought proper, without the smallest regard either to probability or decency, to assert that plots had been fabricated, and that these plots had no foundation except in the foul imagination of ministers. The abuse of that honourable gentleman has been too often repeated to have any degree of novelty with me, or to be entitled to any degree of importance, either with myself, or any other of my honourable friends, who may occasionally happen to be its ob-

* Mr. Sheridan.

jects. But I must own, that there is some degree of novelty indeed in this mode of attack against a report originating from twenty-one members, to whose character for honour and integrity I will not do any injury by comparing it with the quarter from which the attack was made——

[Being here called to order by Mr. Courtenay, for an improper and uncalled-for attack upon the character of his honourable friend (Mr. Sheridan), the Speaker interfered, and allowed that the expressions were disorderly, however they might have arisen from the mode of attack which had been irregularly adopted by the honourable gentleman (Mr. Sheridan) in the first instance.

Mr. Sheridan rising to speak, Mr. Pitt proceeded:—]

Except the honourable gentleman rises for a motion of order I certainly, as having been already before the house, am entitled to be heard. [Here Mr. Sheridan sat down.] I beg leave to say, that I must always bow with deference to any interruption from you, Sir, whose regard to the dignity and impartiality in conducting the business of this house is upon every occasion so evident, and whenever interrupted for any expression that may appear disorderly, and may have escaped me in the heat of debate, I most readily make my apology, where alone it is due, to you and to the house. Still, however, I must be permitted to add, that the language of the honourable gentleman whose observations I was called upon to answer, was neither within the rules of parliamentary debate, nor of parliamentary decency.

I was proceeding, when interrupted, to state, that the honourable gentleman had argued, that the discontinuance of the war would put an end to those proceedings of a committee of this house, which he has chosen to brand with such coarse and indiscriminate censure. The question is not merely, whether his mode of attack is fair and candid with respect to the individuals composing that committee; but how far it is proper to be adopted, when their report has already been received by this house, and been made the foundation of

a measure now sanctioned by the three branches of the legislature—the suspension of the *Habeas Corpus* act. The preamble of that measure states the existence of that plot, as recognized from the investigation of a committee, and the inspection of voluminous papers, which the honourable gentleman has chosen to brand as the fabrication of ministers. But why has he introduced this subject, apparently so little connected with the question? In order, as it appears, to give an account of a transaction, of which, I declare, till this night, I knew nothing*: as little am I acquainted with the dissemination of those inflammatory papers, of which so much has been said by the honourable gentleman. I have, indeed, for these few days past, been engaged with the examination of papers, but papers very different from those alluded to by the honourable gentleman. These papers, voluminous in their size, form the records of those societies, whose proceedings have attracted the notice of government. They contain materials of a nature very interesting indeed, and with which this house will speedily be acquainted. When these materials shall be brought forward, it will then appear, whether there is any real ground for alarm, or for supposing the existence of that plot which has been stated: I shall only desire the house to compare what shall

* Mr. Sheridan, in the course of his speech, had complained of certain liberties, which he conceived had been taken with his character as a member of that house.—"Suppose," continued Mr. Sheridan, "a great magistrate of the city, robed in the ensigns of his office, not lightly over a glass of wine, or after a good dinner, but solemnly and gravely in the court with his brother aldermen, should declare that a member of parliament, by name Mr. Sheridan, would be sent to the Tower within two months, provided the *Habeas Corpus* act were suspended, and should back his assertion with a bet, and so considerable a bet as one hundred and twenty guineas to six,—would you think this a light or trivial matter? And would not gentlemen suppose that such a magistrate, from his known connexion with administration, had some authority for saying so beyond his own ideas as a private man? It would not be orderly to name the honourable magistrate; but if he be in the house, he probably may be known by a gold chain which he wears."

appear upon the face of the report of their committee with what has been asserted by the honourable gentleman, as having been made use of by a respectable member of this house*. I am surprised that it could ever have appeared in any other light than as an expression of levity. The honourable gentleman, however, thinks otherwise. From the serious view in which he has taken it up, it appears that a conspiracy cannot be going abroad, but he immediately takes guilt to himself. If his jealousy be indeed so wakeful, and his fears so easily excited, in all probability the bet which he has mentioned with respect to himself may be a fair speculation.

In one point of view I must indeed thank the honourable gentleman for having introduced the topic of the state of the country, and the existence of plots, however irrelevant it might seem to the subject of debate. However irrelevant it might seem, as introduced by him, it is certainly highly in our favour. For if, from the result of the report of your committee, it shall appear that there is ground to suppose that there has existed a system in this country, (and indeed no country in Europe has been exempted from its effects) to introduce French principles for French purposes, and by French means; if the same system may be traced all over the Continent, and there shall be found to be the most striking coincidence, both in the object aimed at, and the means by which it has been prosecuted; if the whole shall be clearly imputable to the present government of France, and be calculated every where to produce the same effects, which we have witnessed in that country, it must then be admitted, that nothing less than the subversion of that jacobin government, which has been contended for by my honourable friend†, can be adequate to the purposes of the war. The present, indeed, is not a contest for distant, or contingent objects; it is not a contest for acquisition of territory; it is not a contest for power and glory; as little is it carried on merely for any commercial advantage, or any particular form of government; but it is a contest for the security, the tranquillity, and the very existence of Great Britain, connected

* The Lord Mayor. † Mr. Jenkinson.

with that of every established government, and every country in Europe. This is the view of the nature of the war, upon which this house has acted in its former decisions. It is a view confirmed by the experience of every day, and of every hour; it is a view which the events of the present moment have tended still more strongly to impress upon the minds of gentlemen of this house, this moment, which has been chosen of all others in order to induce us to abandon our principles, and reverse our decisions.

I do not think it necessary to comment at length upon the string of resolutions brought forward by the right honourable gentleman *. They are evidently introduced for the express purpose of recording upon the journals of this house the opinions of that right honourable gentleman with respect to the nature, the object, and the probable events of the war—opinions which he has brought forward both in the course of the present and of the former session. The substance of all his resolutions may be reduced to two, to each of which, now that I am upon my legs, I shall feel it necessary to say a very few words. The right honourable gentleman, in a speech more distinguished by its length and ability, than by any additional matter or novelty of argument, divided the whole subject into three or four periods, in order to prove, that the subversion of the jacobin government was inconsistent with the former professions of this government, and in its own nature impolitic and impracticable. In order to prove his assertion, the right honourable gentleman began with adverting to the professions of neutrality, held out on the part of this country previous to the declarations, and to the negociations set on foot, in order to secure the continuance of peace. To this part of his argument, the answer of my honourable friend was so full and satisfactory, as to require on my part no addition. I have only to state, along with him, that it is not every provocation which justifies a war. The French revolution might not, in the first instance, appear to be so great an evil, as it has

* Mr. Fox.

since evinced itself to be. It might not be discovered to have such pernicious effects as have since unfolded themselves to our view. The extent to which it carries the principle of propagating its doctrines by fire and sword is now, however, no longer a matter of doubt. The principle is rendered still more dangerous by the means which it possesses for carrying it into effect. Can we, then, be supposed to be pledged to the same line of conduct in the present moment, which, in the first instance, we might have deemed it prudent to adopt?—In proportion as the extent of the evil discloses itself, does not there arise a necessity for increased means of resistance? The right honourable gentleman stated, that even subsequent to the memorable period of the 10th of August, we continued our professions of neutrality, though we thought proper to break off all intercourse with the French nation on account of their conduct to the sovereign. Of the principles upon which that intercourse was broken off, the house have already expressed their decided approbation; and can they then, with regard either to the dignity of their character, or the consistency of their principles, renew, in a time of war, that intercourse which they thought proper, on such solid grounds, to break off in time of peace; and at a time too, when, I contend, that the attempt to renew such intercourse would be as impotent as it would be disgraceful?

The right honourable gentleman stated, that the objects first held out for the war on the part of this country, were the breach of treaty by the French with respect to the Scheldt, and the views of aggrandizement which they disclosed in seizing upon the territory of the neighbouring powers. So far I admit he has stated justly; but when he says, that all idea of interference with the government of France was entirely disclaimed, he states what is not the fact.—Such an interference, I grant, was not precisely stated; it was, however, referred to, even in the first instance. And, in proof of this assertion, I refer to the following passage in his Majesty's mes-

sage, brought down to this house so early as the 28th of January, 1793.

"In the present situation of affairs, his Majesty thinks it indispensably necessary to make a farther augmentation of his forces by sea and land, for maintaining the security and rights of his own dominions, for supporting his allies, and for opposing views of aggrandizement and ambition on the part of France, which would be at all times dangerous to the general interests of Europe, but are particularly so, when connected with the propagation of principles which lead to to the violation of the most sacred duties, and are utterly subversive of the peace and order of all civil society."

Such was the language even then adopted by his Majesty, and re-echoed in the answer of this house to that message. A few days after, came the declaration of war on the part of the French. What were the sentiments I expressly declared in the course of the last session, I refer to the recollection of every member present. A few days previous to the close of last session, the right honourable gentleman came forward with a motion precisely similar in nature and effect to the resolutions which he has this day proposed to the house. I then stated, that while the existing system continued in France, we could have but little hope of obtaining a peace upon solid and permanent grounds; that, could a peace be obtained, I certainly should not consider the continuance of the system, as itself, an objection. At the same time I expressly assured the house that the prospect of affairs was such as not to afford the smallest ground of rational expectation of our ever being able to obtain such a peace as we could either accept, or, for any length of time, hope to enjoy, while France remained under the influence of jacobin councils, and that the prospect of bringing the war to a conclusion, as well as the security for any engagements which we might form with France, must ultimately depend upon the destruction of those principles, which were hostile to every regular government, and subversive of all good faith. I asserted farther, that if an opportunity should occur, in which we

might interfere with advantage in the internal government of France, we certainly should avail ourselves of every such opportunity, as an operation of the war. Had I, as the right honourable gentleman has contended, disclaimed all such interference in the present war, I should have done what never has been done in any former war. And I have only to remind the right honourable gentleman, of what, upon a former occasion, was his opinion with respect to an interference, which government found necessary to make in the affairs of Holland. When we attempted to defend that measure upon the principles of justice, he contended that we proved too much, and that, in order to justify it, it was only necessary to shew that it was for the interest of Great Britain. Upon what principle then can he now possibly urge that an interference, admitted in every former war, should become unjustifiable in the present, that commenced, on the part of France, with an interference against ourselves?

Having supposed, then, that all idea of interference was disclaimed, the right honourable gentleman proceeded to bring forward a charge of inconsistency, from the declaration of Lord Hood, at Toulon, and that afterwards published by his Majesty, addressed to the people of France. These declarations, I affirm, are perfectly consistent. That of Lord Hood only promises protection to the people of Toulon, so far as he could grant it, without specifying any particular form of government—they chose to pledge themselves to the constitution of 1789. The declaration of his Majesty offers protection to all the people of France who shall approve of an hereditary monarchy. What then do the resolutions, prepared by the right honourable gentleman, call upon you to do?—to counteract all your former sentiments—to abandon those principles to which you have pledged yourselves—to rescind the measures which you have solemnly adopted—and, after having displayed the extent of your resources, and put into the hands of his Majesty means for carrying on the war, to tell him that he shall not avail himself of those means, and abandon every resource, except that

of making peace with France. It is to require you, at the end of the session, to make a recantation of all that you have done in every former part of it—to contradict all your former professions, and to renounce opinions formed upon the most serious deliberation, and confirmed by repeated acts. It is worthy of remark, that the gentlemen on the other side, who are so fond of accusing others of inconsistency, take to themselves the credit of supporting the war to a certain period. Beyond that period, they have stated they found it impossible to give it any farther support, though I must observe, looking to their general conduct, if the periods at which they gave it support, and at which they thought necessary to withdraw it, were to be transposed, the difference would be very inconsiderable. What was the period, down to which they take the credit of having given support to the war?—the passing of the French Corps bill. Then it was, it seems, that they first discovered that the present was a war for the purpose of an internal interference in the government of France. But it is of little consequence to this house, what are the opinions of individuals, or what the pretences which they may hold out. It is their business to consider what has been their general line of conduct, and what course they are bound to adopt on the present occcasion, from a regard to the dignity of their character, and the consistency of their measures. In this point of view, they will consider whether they have this night heard any thing to induce them to deviate from these principles, which they adopted on the most mature deliberation. The right honourable gentleman, in order to throw discredit on the object of the war, has had recourse to a confusion of argument. He chuses to confound the subversion of the present jacobin government with the conquest of France, and states, that we have in view nothing less than the entire subjugation of that country. He forgets that the objects are entirely different: we have no desire to conquer France; we wish only to free it from a system of tyranny equally oppressive to itself and dangerous to its neighbours; which can, in the first instance, only exist by the misery of its subjects, and menaces

in its progress the destruction of every regular government. But he states, as an argument against our success, that the force of that government is in the present moment stronger than ever, while he adds, however, by way of parenthesis, no matter whether by terror, or by whatever means. He seems to think that the means by which that power is supported, have nothing to do with the question. I contend that they form the whole; since on those means the permanence and stability of the government must depend. If it is a power acquired by the influence of terror, and supported by a system of coercion, it is neither likely to be solid nor lasting.

Another object which the right honourable gentleman has urged, is, that even if you should succeed in subverting the present government of France, such a measure would be in itself impolitic, and could afford you no prospect of rational advantage. What, says he, would you destroy a government before you have made up your minds what to substitute in its stead? do you consider the consequence of again setting the minds of men adrift, and how can you be sure that the result will be better than what you at present witness? This is exactly an illustration of the mode of argument adopted by the right honourable gentleman, who, consulting neither the policy nor expediency of the particular question, is always addicted to push his general principles to the extreme. You ought not, says he, to subvert the present form of government, because, if the French are to be left to chuse for themselves, you do not know by what other form it may be succeeded, whether an absolute or a limited monarchy, or a different species of republic. In opposition to this reasoning, we can safely decide from experience of its effects, that any form of government which succeeds the present, founded upon jacobin principles, though not the best, must be comparatively good. But as a reason why we ought not to seek the subversion of this jacobin government, or be apprehensive of danger from its existence, the right honourable gentleman has stated, that it has been found perfectly possible for opposite governments to exist together,

without interfering with each other. I grant that this is perfectly possible with respect to any established government, however defective, acting upon certain rules, and from certain principles. But I cannot admit that it is the case with respect to a system such as the present established in France, a system such as never existed before in any country, and to which no analogy can be found in the history of mankind; a system admitting of no modification of its vices, excluding all principles, and bearing in itself the seeds of hostility to every regular government; a system not possessing the means of power for the protection of its subjects, but usurping them for their oppression. Such a system presents no remedy for its vices, or hope of security to its neighbours, but in its entire subversion. On all these grounds, I trust that the policy, consistency, and necessity of a vigorous prosecution of the war, will still appear to remain unimpeached.

I have only a few words to say to that resolution of the right honourable gentleman, which suggests, that we ought to aim at peace by negociation. In desiring us to have recourse to negociation, he contends, that we have at least nothing to apprehend from the experiment, even if it should fail, and that to propose terms can surely be attended with no harm. The answer of my honourable friend* to this part of his argument was so full and satisfactory, as to render it unnecessary for me to add any thing farther. My honourable friend stated, in the clearest manner, the little hope we could have of success in any negociation from the nature of the jacobin system, and the character of the present French rulers, and the still less security which we should have for the performance of any engagement into which they might enter. But the question is not merely whether these persons, now at the head of affairs in France, would be disposed to treat with us, or whether we could have any security for any peace which we might make with them? We are to recollect, that while that system, with which we now

* Mr. Jenkinson.

contend, continues in France, we can have no peace upon any terms short of absolute ruin and dishonour; and that, by an express law of the constitution, any Frenchman who should propose to treat with us, except upon the conditions of abandoning our most sacred principles and our dearest rights, of surrendering our constitution, dethroning our virtuous monarch, and consenting to introduce into this country that horrible system of anarchy which they propose to our imitation, is declared a traitor. What then becomes of the argument of the right honourable gentleman, that, even if we should enter into negociation, no harm could possibly be attendant upon our failure? Have we not reason to suppose, that by those who avow such principles, the terms which we should propose would most certainly be rejected? And what then would be the consequence? By entering into negociation we should have dissolved that confederacy, on which we can alone depend for success against the common enemy. To the French we should have given confidence and vigour; and, baffled in our expectations of peace, should ourselves be again obliged to have recourse to war, when war was found to be our only alternative, and when we had deprived ourselves of the means for its vigorous prosecution.

The acquisition of the West India islands, the right honourable gentleman affirmed, was but of little consequence, as to attaining the object of the war—the subversion of the jacobin government of Paris. I grant that it may appear of little consequence as to its immediate effects; but may it not be supposed to have a collateral influence? Is it indeed of little consequence in the first year of the war to cut up their resources, and destroy the sinews of their commerce? Is the injury to their revenue less fatal, though, from the monstrous and gigantic expedients of finance to which they have had recourse, it may not, in the first instance, be perceived? Is it of little consequence to us in the prosecution of a war for which we do not ourselves possess sufficient military force, and in aid of which we must have recourse to our pecuniary resources, thus to procure the means of increas-

ing these resources, by extending our commerce, and opening new sources of industry? When the right honourable gentleman, then, represents the loss of these West India islands, as but little felt, or altogether contemned, by the French, what obviously is the inference? Is it not that the government which can suffer such a limb to be torn from the empire without shrinking, which can view with indifference and unconcern the sinews of its commerce destroyed, and the sources of permanent revenue annihilated, can have but little interest or feeling in common with its subjects? If, indeed, we can suppose that the French government could see the danger of their colonies without fear, and submit to their loss without regret, it would only be a proof that they had become callous from desperation. Yet after the right honourable gentleman has represented these islands as considered but of little consequence by the convention, how does he proceed to argue? He considers them in one respect important, as they may be employed by you as valuable *mediæ* of negociation—that is, he proposes to you to give up acquisitions which are highly valuable to you, as a bribe to induce those who despise them, to abandon their favourite project.

But if the right honourable gentleman should not succeed in prevailing upon you to adopt any of his resolutions which go to offer terms of negociation, still he has one resolution of a different nature: he calls upon you, by an explicit declaration, to prescribe the precise form of government, which you mean to insist should be adopted in France. This strange proposition he clothes indeed in elegant language: in that case, says he, you certainly would have fewer friends, but then they would be more sincere. What is the case? that at present there are a great many of different opinions with respect to the form of government which they would wish to see established, but who, equally disapproving of the present horrible system, are prepared to concur with you for its destruction. These, whom it ought to be your object to unite and concentrate, he calls upon you, by this resolution, to alienate and disperse? a resolution too, which goes beyond the line of your policy, inasmuch as your object is the

subversion of a system incompatible with your interest, and with the security of Europe: and that once effected, the government that shall be deemed most proper to succeed, will then naturally become the object of modification to the different parties. I am the more surprised that such a resolution should have come from the right honourable gentleman, as an honourable friend * of his had stated as a principle, and it is the only part of his speech in which I can agree with him; "That seldom has any nation laid down a peremptory declaration, from which it has not found it necessary at some time or other to recede." I am astonished, indeed, that the right honourable gentleman, who so much disapproves of all idea of internal interference in the government of another country, should himself, by this resolution, carry the principle so far—to a length greatly beyond the line of our policy, and that object, which by our interference we propose to ourselves. It is not, in fact, more inconsistent with our principles than with his own: you could not adopt it without reprobating those sentiments which have been so often maintained by the right honourable gentleman; nor could he himself vote for it without giving up all his former opinions on the subject. This last resolution, therefore, I cannot deem more admissible than the others: it is not less incongruous in point of policy, than the former were repugnant to all those principles with respect to the present contest so solemnly adopted, and so repeatedly sanctioned by this house.

Upon a division, the previous question, which had been moved by Mr. Jenkinson, was carried;

Ayes 208
Noes 57

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* Mr. Sheridan.

December 30, 1794.

DEBATE on the address in answer to his Majesty's most gracious speech* on opening the session.

An amendment to the address being moved by Mr. Wilberforce, "advising his Majesty to order a negociation for peace on such terms as should be deemed just and reasonable,"

Mr. PITT delivered his sentiments to the following effect:

I should not have so much endeavoured, Sir, to have engaged your attention at the present moment, had not a sudden indisposition seized me, which I was apprehensive might, at a later hour, have incapacitated me from entering fully into the

* "*My Lords and Gentlemen*,

"After the uniform experience which I have had of your zealous regard for the interests of my people, it is a great satisfaction to me to recur to your advice and assistance, at a period which calls for the full exertion of your energy and wisdom.

"Notwithstanding the disappointments and reverses which we have experienced in the course of the last campaign, I retain a firm conviction of the necessity of persisting in a vigorous prosecution of the just and necessary war in which we are engaged.

"You will, I am confident, agree with me, that it is only from firmness and perseverance that we can hope for the restoration of peace on safe and honourable grounds, and for the preservation and permanent security of our dearest interests.

"In considering the situation of our enemies, you will not fail to observe, that the efforts which have led to their successes, and the unexampled means by which alone those efforts could have been supported, have produced among themselves the pernicious effects which were to be expected; and that every thing which has passed in the interior of the country, has shewn the progressive and rapid decay of their resources, and the instability of every part of that violent and unnatural system which is equally ruinous to France, and incompatible with the tranquillity of other nations.

"The States General of the United Provinces have nevertheless been led, by a sense of present difficulties, to enter into negociations for peace with the party now prevailing in that unhappy country. No established government or independent state can, under the present circumstances, derive real security

discussion of a question, upon which I must be supposed to feel most anxious to deliver my sentiments.

I am aware, that there are some gentlemen with whom the original opinions, which they have expressed on the war, pre-

from such negociations: On our part, they could not be attempted without sacrificing both our honour and our safety to an enemy, whose chief animosity is avowedly directed against these kingdoms.

" I have therefore continued to use the most effectual means for the further augmentation of my forces; and I shall omit no opportunity of concerting the operations of the next campaign with such of the powers of Europe as are impressed with the same sense of the necessity of vigour and exertion. I place the fullest reliance on the valour of my forces, and on the affection and public spirit of my people, in whose behalf I am contending, and whose safety and happiness are the objects of my constant solicitude.

" The local importance of Corsica, and the spirited efforts of its inhabitants to deliver themselves from the yoke of France, determined me not to withhold the protection which they sought for; and I have since accepted the crown and sovereignty of that country, according to an instrument, a copy of which I have directed to be laid before you.

" I have great pleasure in informing you, that I have concluded a treaty of amity, commerce, and navigation, with the United States of America, in which it has been my object to remove, as far as possible, all grounds of jealousy and misunderstanding, and to improve an intercourse beneficial to both countries. As soon as the ratifications shall have been exchanged, I will direct a copy of this treaty to be laid before you, in order that you may consider of the propriety of making such provisions as may appear necessary for carrying it into effect.

" I have the greatest satisfaction in announcing to you the happy event of the conclusion of a treaty for the marriage of my son the Prince of Wales, with the Princess Caroline, daughter of the Duke of Brunswick. The constant proofs of your affection for my person and family persuade me, that you will participate in the sentiments I feel on an occasion so interesting to my domestic happiness, and that you will enable me to make provision for such an establishment, as you may think suitable to the rank and dignity of the heir apparent to the crown of these kingdoms."

" *Gentlemen of the House of Commons,*

" The considerations which prove the necessity of a vigorous prosecution of the war will, I doubt not, induce you to make a timely and ample provision for the several branches of the public service, the estimates for which I have directed to be laid before you. While I regret the necessity of large additional

vent me from entertaining any hopes of concurrence. But there are other gentlemen, who, having supported the war at its commencement, have been led, by the disastrous events of the campaign, to change their former sentiments, and to withdraw their former support. It is with these gentlemen that I shall consider myself more immediately at issue. And, Sir, I must first make some remarks on the arguments which they have drawn from the words of the address. To this address they say that they cannot give their assent, because it pledges them *never* to make peace with the *republican* government of France. I do not consider that it does so pledge them. It says only, that with a government, such as the present government of France, we cannot treat on terms that can be deemed secure. And, Sir, where does there exist this imperious necessity to sue for peace? Are we sunk down and depressed to such an absence of hope, and to such a want of resources? If we were indeed so calamitously situated—if we were indeed so devoid of hope, and so deprived of resources—if the continuance of the war produced so intolerable a pressure, then, perhaps, we might consent to a change of system. I am ready to confess, that I can conceive an imaginary case of a peace being made with the government of France, even in its republican form; but I will fairly

burdens on my subjects, it is a just consolation and satisfaction to me to observe the state of our credit, commerce, and resources, which is the natural result of the continued exertions of industry under the protection of a free and well regulated government."

"*My Lords and Gentlemen,*

"A just sense of the blessings now so long enjoyed by this country will, I am persuaded, encourage you to make every effort, which can enable you to transmit those blessings unimpaired to your posterity.

"I entertain a confident hope that, under the protection of Providence, and with a constancy and perseverance on our part, the principles of social order, morality, and religion, will ultimately be successful; and that my faithful people will find their present exertions and sacrifices rewarded by the secure and permanent enjoyment of tranquillity at home, and by the deliverance of Europe from the greatest danger with which it has been threatened since the establishment of civilized society."

say also, that I have no idea of any peace being secure, unless France return to the monarchial system. That there may, however, be intermediate changes that may give the probability of a peace with that country, even should it continue a republic, I am ready to allow, though I certainly think that the monarchial form of constitution is best for all the countries of Europe, and most calculated to ensure to each of them general and individual happiness. Considering myself, therefore, as I said before, principally at issue with those who now, for the first time, dissent from the prosecution of the war, I am content to deliver my sentiments before I hear the arguments of some gentlemen, who will probably enter into a more full discussion than the subject has yet received.

Sir, the reasons that have induced gentlemen to dissent from the prosecution of the war, seem to have possessed a considerable influence on the manner in which they speak of the justice and necessity of the war at its commencement; and their language is now fainter and feebler than I had reason to expect. Contending, as these gentlemen and I did, with the new and monstrous systems of cruelty, anarchy, and impiety: against those whose principles trampled upon civilized society, religion, and law—contending, I say, with such a system, I could not have entertained the slightest expectation, that from them would have proceeded such an amendment.

It has pleased inscrutable Providence that this power of France should triumph over every thing that has been opposed to it! but let us not therefore fall without making any efforts to resist it;—let us not sink without measuring its strength. If any thing could make me agree to retire from the contest, it would be the consciousness of not being able to continue it. I would at least have no cause to reproach myself on the retrospect. I would not yield till I could exclaim,

——Potuit quæ plurima virtus
Esse, fuit: toto certatum est corpore regni.

If, Sir, I have expressed myself with more emotion than is

consistent with the propriety of debate, the particular situation in which I stand, opposing and contesting the opinions of those, with whom I have been, on all occasions, in almost all points, fortunate enough to agree, will, I trust, excuse the warmth of my feelings.

The arguments used by my honourable friend, in support of his amendment, may be divided into two classes: The impolicy of continuing the war, and the insecurity of peace. One of the arguments which he uses in support of the impolicy of continuing the war, is grounded on the recent changes that have taken place in France. My right honourable friend's speech was a sufficient answer to that argument. The change that has taken place in France is only the change of an attachment to a name, and not to a substance. Those who have succeeded to the governmen since the fall of Robespierre, have succeeded to the same sort of government. They adopt the same revolutionary system; and though they have made a more moderate use of their power than Robespierre, yet they differ from him only about as much as Robespierre did from Brissot, who incited the war against this country. The present government, therefore, deserves no more the name of moderation than that established by Brissot and his followers, who committed the unprovoked aggression against Great Britain. The system of the present governors has its root in the same unqualified rights of man, the same principles of liberty and equality—principles, by which they flatter the people with the possession of the theoretical rights of man, all of which they vitiate and violate in practice. The mild principles of our government are a standing reproach to theirs, which are as intolerant as the rankest popish bigotry. Their pride and ambition lead them not so much to conquer, as to carry desolation and destruction into all the governments of Europe. Have we any right, therefore, to suppose that victory and triumph can produce so great a change in their detestable principles, or that success is such a corrective of all those vicious qualities that pervade their principles and their practice?

Do the gentlemen who now desert the war, expect that a peace can be obtained, of such a nature, as has been so well described by my honourable friend*? Do they hope for a free and useful commerce? Do they expect that the armies on both sides will be disbanded, and the fleets be called home? Do they mean to put an end to the traitorous correspondence act? I believe not. I can easily suppose that those gentlemen who have, in an early part of the evening, so decidedly given their opinion with respect to the late trials, and who have supposed all the persons in this country to be so pure, as not even to be infected by contact with jacobin principles, would foresee no danger from a French alliance, and would look forward with satisfaction to the consequences of such a measure. But such is not the case with my honourable friends, who even, in such an event, talked of the necessity of additional precautions, in order to guard the dignity of the crown, and preserve the tranquillity of the country. What then would be the rational prospect of advantage to this country from a peace with an enraged enemy, in which there could exist no confidence on either side, but which must necessarily give rise to a state of jealousy, suspicion, and constant armament? How long would this state of trouble or repose last? How will you come to the contest when it is renewed? If you disband your armies, if you diminish your force, you will then put an end to that machine which, under the two first years of a war, can barely be said to have been raised to a point high enough to try the strength of the country. Disband your force, and see if the same means and the same period can raise it again to the same point. You will then be opposed in another war with a diminished military power to an enemy, who may have found it as difficult to disband his armies, as you would find it difficult to collect fresh forces. They will again be prepared to start with the same gigantic resources, deriving fresh confidence from the disposition which you had shewn to peace, and new vigour

* Mr. Canning.

from the interval which had been afforded to hostilities. But will that be all? What assistance can you expect from the continental powers, if you dissolve the confederacy? And can you expect to assemble such a confederacy again? Suppose the enemy made an attack upon Holland, Prussia, Austria, Spain, and the states of Italy, or all or each of these; on what grounds, I would ask, could you rouse the spirit, or raise the vigour of this country again, when, from a sense of your inferiority, you have before given up the contest at a period when the confederacy was at its height? On the event of this night's debate, may depend what shall be your future situation with respect to your allies. If you do not now proclaim your weakness, if you do not renounce your prospects, you have still great hopes from the alliance of Europe. Prussia, Austria, Spain, and the States of Italy, are yet in such a situation that their assistance may be looked to in carrying on the contest.

The honourable gentlemen who supported the amendment, disclaimed the language of fear; they said they knew what Great Britain could do, if once it was roused. What then is to be inferred from all their former professions? Is this a business, in which, after all, we were not serious? Is this cause, which has been admitted to involve not only the most important interests of Great Britain, but the safety of Europe, and the order of society, not considered to be of such a nature as requires all the energies of the country? What then is the greater necessity to which they looked? what the occasion on which they deemed that they could more worthily employ their efforts? If we should dissolve the powerful confederacy with which we are now united, could we hope again to bring it back at our summons? and shall we not, in the case of a fresh rupture, be exposed alone to the fury of France, without the smallest prospect of assistance from any other quarter? Besides, I think I shall shew you that you are desired to relinquish the conflict, at a time when all the national and artificial resources of your enemy are verging to a rapid dissolution.

I must now take notice of a speculation which has been

indulged—that if you withdraw, France will return to some more moderate system of government. I ask whether we ought to put ourselves in such a situation of hazard, which, if decided against us, would involve us in much greater calamities than we have yet experienced, and would reduce us to a situation in which we should be without means and without resources?

When it is said, therefore, that a peace will have the effect to overthrow the government of France, the proposition is by no means clear; the probability is much greater, that the persons now at the head of the government, will, in order to continue their own power, (and in France, it is to be recollected, that the continuance of their power is connected with that of their lives, so that, in addition to the incentives of ambition, they have the all-powerful motive of self-preservation,) be induced to continue the same system of measures that now prevails. Obliged as they would be to recal a numerous army from the frontiers, will the troops of whom it was composed, after having tasted the sweets of plunder and the licence of the field, be contented to return to the peaceful occupations of industry? Will they not, in order to amuse their daring spirit, and divert from themselves the effects of their turbulence, be compelled to find them some employment? And what is the employment to which they will most naturally direct their first attention? They will employ them to crush all the remains of courage, loyalty, and piety, that are yet to be found in France, and extinguish all that gallant and unhappy party, from whose co-operation we may promise ourselves, at any future period, to derive advantage. What else can be expected from those Moderates, who, though assuming that appellation, have, in succeeding to the party of Robespierre, only established themselves on a new throne of terror? Thus the peace which is in the present instance proposed, as the means of safety, will ultimately only operate to ensure the work of destruction.

This being my feeling, my objection to asking for peace is,

that peace, under the present circumstances, is *not desirable*, unless you can shew that the pressure is greater than, as I shall prove to you from a comparative view of the situation and resources of the two countries, it is.

But this is but a small part of my objections to the measure. My next objection is, that my honourable friend has not told us what sort of peace we are to have: unless, therefore, they state this, I say, that they would reduce us to a gratuitous loss of honour, and an unnecessary despair. On the kind of peace we might obtain, I will ask my honourable friend, whether he will say that we ought to leave the Austrian Netherlands in the possession of the French?—He will not say so.

I have heard it stated in passing, that the ground of war has been done away by the Dutch negotiation for peace. However paradoxical it may appear, I assert that the safety of Holland, even if she do make peace, depends on our being at war; for if both countries were at peace, then France would be left without restraint. Who that looks to the proceedings of the Convention, does not see that it is their policy, on every occasion, to keep up their arrogant and menacing system, and to hold a high tone of superiority with respect to all other nations? By these means they have contrived to cherish that spirit of enthusiasm among the people, which has enabled them to make such extraordinary exertions, and on which they depend for the continuance of their power. But who, I would ask, will say that France will make peace on terms, I will not make use of the word moderation, but of concession, when you make peace from a confession of her superiority? And this naturally leads me to an assertion made use of by me during the last session, (an assertion not accurately alluded to by an honourable baronet*), relative to the decree of the national convention of the 13th of April, which states, that the preliminary of peace must be a recognition of the unity and indivisibility of the republic, on the terms of equality:—a decree which has neither been re-

* Sir Richard Hill.

pealed nor modified, and which, if you make peace during its existence, would sign the dissolution of your parliaments and of your present system of civil society.

Again, I say, that if this were only an ordinary war, and if after two years you had gained the West-India islands as an indemnification, and had been convinced of the strength of your own resources, and that the means of the enemy were decaying, would you consent to make concessions in order to obtain peace? You received the West-India colonies into your protection; will you then give them back to a system, under which they can have no protection? I say we cannot do this without being convinced that the further continuance of the war could only produce misfortune, misery, and ruin. Will you add something more terrific to the colonies than all the horrors of that miserable trade which has peopled those miserable colonies?

Before too you made such a surrender, there is another question to be considered: no less than whether you would afford to the French an unresisted opportunity of working upon the unfortunate system that now prevails in that country, and introducing their government of anarchy, the horrors of which are even more dreadful than those of slavery. To those who have in common deplored the miseries of the unfortunate negroes, it must appear astonishing, that any proposition likely to be attended with such consequences, could ever enter into the mind of my honourable friend*. Besides, it is impossible to ascertain what a wide-spread circle of calamity the adoption of this proposition may produce. If once the principles of jacobinism should obtain a footing in the French West-India islands, could we hope that our own would be safe from the contagion? If it has been found scarcely possible to shut out the infection of these principles from the well-tempered, and variously blended orders of society which subsist in this country, where a principle of subordination runs through all the

* Mr. Wilberforce.

ranks of society, and all are united by a reciprocity of connexion and interest, what may be expected to be their effects operating upon the deplorable system pervading in that quarter? It would be giving up your own colonies speedily to be devoted to all the horrors of anarchy and devastation.

Such would be the *status quo*. That the *status quo* would probably not be accepted, I have before argued. Will the country, therefore, consign itself, if not to the language, at least to the posture, of supplication?

With respect to our situation, I have not heard it so fully stated as it is my intention to do. Of the last campaign I shall not be suspected of a wish to conceal the disasters, to deny the defeats, or to disallow the bad effects of the wounds inflicted on the two great military powers of Europe. But can I forget what the energies and perseverance of Britons have effected in former wars? Or that constancy from a point of honour in greater difficulties has at length produced the object at which it aimed?

Will any man say, that the bare event of military disasters, and territories taken, is a fair way of weighing the resources of the belligerent powers? No, not in any wars, and least of all in this, as far as it relates to this country. All wars depend now on the finances of the nations engaged in them. This observation particularly applies to the present war. The balance of territorial acquisitions and pecuniary resources is in our favour; and I am not afraid to assert, that, putting together what has been lost in territory and what has been spent in money, yet with a view to resources, what has been lost by France is more in point of permanent value and present means than the losses of all the allies composed together.

What, let me ask, are the resources of France? They exist by means as extraordinary as the events they have brought about—their pecuniary expenses are beyond any thing ever known—and, supported by requisition of person, life, and property, they depend entirely upon terror—every thing that weakens that system, weakens their means, and as the

adoption of moderation saps it on one side, so the perseverance in attack cannot but pull it down on the other—take every part of it, one by one, view their expenditure, and then see, whether terror is not the instrument by which they have raised their extraordinary supplies, and obtained all their unexampled successes.

Let us enter into a view of the actual expenditure of France. This expenditure, since the revolution, has amounted to the enormous sum of four hundred and eighty millions, spent since the commencement of the war. Three hundred and twenty millions have been the price of the efforts that have enabled them to wrest from the allies those territories, which are now in their possession. What your expenses have been during the same period, I need not state. I ask now, whether it is likely that France will see you exhausted first? I think not. But it may be said, that what the French have spent, proves what they can spend. To this I reply, have they been enabled to bear this expenditure, by the increase of their revenue, or by any of the ordinary means of France? No: but by the creation of an unlimited paper credit. I desire gentlemen to look at all the debates of the national convention, and they will find that all the deputies agree in this point—that they cannot increase the emission of the paper-money without ruin, and that the miseries arising from this system, aggravate all the calamities of the country. Many persons at first imagined that assignats must have stopped early in 1793. The fact undoubtedly was, that, previously to that period, it was thought the emission was greater than France could bear, and that no further creation could take place without producing a depreciation on the value of assignats, and an immoderate increase in the price of provisions. The whole circulating medium of France at the highest, was 90,000,000 sterling. In August 1793, assignats existed to the amount of 140 millions; commerce was then declining; agriculture was discouraged; population checked; a forced loan of 40 millions was adopted on the idea, that to the amount of 130 millions they could not main-

tain assignats in circulation; as early as May or June, assignats had lost nearly half their value. A louis in specie soon afterwards produced 144 livres; then it was that the system of terror commenced, and that a system of credit was begun, which had its foundation in fear.

It may be asked, could any man have imagined that such a plan would have been resorted to? That it was resorted to—that it succeeded, has been proved. Let us look to the principles of it. There was a law which compelled every man to take at par, that which was worth only one sixth of the sum for which it was taken: a law for the *maximum* of the price of all commodities: a law by which no person was permitted to renounce his occupation, under the penalty of twenty years imprisonment. But you will tell me, that this proves how unlimited the powers and resources of the French are. My reply is, that such a system could neither be undertaken nor succeed but by means which could not last. I will not detain you by detail, but merely mention the other means of terror: the constant activity of the guillotine; the ferocious despotism of the deputies on missions. In addition to all the other engines of torture, Cambon, the mouth of the convention in matters of finance, tells us, that, in every district, there were revolutionary committees to watch the execution of the decrees of the convention, and to enable the convention to seize the spoil of the people; the pay of these committees amounted annually to 26 millions sterling. I say this standing army of revolutionary committees is a mean adequate to produce so mighty an end.

Let us add now a new creation of assignats of 130 millions, which increased the total to 260 millions. Will any man say that though the system of terror is done away, the effects can remain? When the system of terror was at an end, the *maximum* ceased to be observed: assignats were then converted into money, and hence the discount became enormous. The fall of Roberspierre took place in July; three months afterwards, the discount was 3-4ths per cent. or 75 on the 100. I have even the

authority of Tallien for saying that the French cannot maintain their assignats, without contracting their expenses and diminishing their forces. And it should be recollected this has been their only resource. Is it then too much to say, their resources are nearly at an end? It is this unlimited power which the French convention have assumed to purchase or to seize all property, as suited their purposes, that accounts for the stupendous scale of operations which they have been able to pursue. This circumstance completely solves the phenomenon, which otherwise would appear so inexplicable, and is adequate to all those miraculous effects which have attended the progress of the French revolution, and which seemed to baffle all reasoning, as much as they have exceeded all human expectation. In all these circumstances we have sufficient inducements to carry on the war, if not with the certainty of faith, yet at least with the confidence of expectation;—a war, the immediate termination of which must be attended with certain evil, and the prosecution of which, under the present circumstances, is at least not without great probable hope.

If we look to the situation of France, they are now attempting to have recourse to a milder and more moderate system,—a system which will only deprive them of those prodigious energies, which they have hitherto exerted with such astonishing effect; but they no longer indeed possess the same means, and cannot therefore be expected to display the same exertions. Will it be possible for them all at once to restore the farmer to the occupations of agriculture, and the merchant to the pursuits of commerce, and to replace, in an instant, the devastations of war and plunder, by the arts of peace, and the exertions of industry? It will require years of tranquillity to restore them to the enjoyment of those ordinary resources, which they possessed previous to the commencement of the present destructive war—resources which they can no longer employ. For even could it be supposed that Roberspierre were raised from the dead, they would no longer be qualified to display the same energies which, under his administration, were called forth by

the influence of a system of terror; the means by which these exertions have been supplied are now exhausted. Where can they possibly resort for fresh supplies? Can it be supposed, that when the forced loan failed at the time it was attempted, it can again be tried and succeed in a time much more unfavourable to it, when the system of terror is almost dissolved?

The question then is—have we, under the present circumstances, the prospect of being able to bring as great a force into the field, as will require from the French the same degree of exertion which has been necessary in the former campaigns? Even let it be supposed that Holland should fall, and that circumstances should be such that we can no longer look for assistance from the court of Berlin, yet I see no reason to believe that, in the next campaign, we cannot increase the British forces on the continent to an amount that shall nearly supply the deficiency of Prussian troops, and act with more effect. Other powers look with attention and anxiety on this night's debate. If you afford to those powers the means of making large exertions, you will oblige France to make efforts to which she is now unequal. If you act with spirit, I see no reason why the powers of Italy and Spain may not make a diversion, and thereby accomplish the important purpose I have before stated—a purpose, in the accomplishment of which, the happiness, almost the existence, of Europe entirely rests?

The amendment was rejected;

Ayes..... 73
Noes.....246

and the original address was then agreed to.

January 26, 1795.

On a motion by Mr. Grey, "That it is the opinion of this House, that the existence of the present government of France ought not to be considered as precluding, at this time, a negociation for peace,"—

Mr. Pitt expressed himself extremely desirous of taking the earliest opportunity to deliver his sentiments on the present im-

portant question. Before, however, he stated the grounds of his objection to the resolution moved by the honourable gentleman, and before he proposed the amendment, which he meant to submit to the house, he was anxious that they might be fully in possession, both of the repeated declarations of his Majesty, and the sentiments that had been expressed by parliament on former occasions. For this purpose, he desired the clerk to read a passage from his Majesty's speech on the 21st of January, 1794, and the answer of the house; and likewise part of the declaration of the 29th of October, 1793; and the declaration of the 20th of November, 1793, at Toulon. [They were accordingly read.]

He would take the liberty, in the course of what he had to offer to the house, to contend, that there was nothing at present in the situation of the country, or of Europe, which ought to induce the house to depart from the sentiments recorded in those declarations; from the sentiments expressed from the throne; and from those sentiments which had received the approbation of parliament. He would contend that the motion that had been made was directly inconsistent with those principles, and he would farther contend, that, whatever there was in the present situation of the country, it called on the house, instead of acceding to the honourable gentleman's motion, to shew to our enemies and to the world, that we did not shrink from those sober and rational principles which we had uniformly maintained. With that view, he thought it right in the outset to mention the precise nature and terms of the amendment he meant to propose, which was as follows:

"That, under the present circumstances, this house feels itself called upon to declare its determination firmly and steadily to support his Majesty in the vigorous prosecution of the present just and necessary war, as affording, at this time, the only reasonable expectation of permanent security and peace to this country: and that, for the attainment of these objects, this house relies, with equal confidence, on his Majesty's intention to employ vigorously the force and resources of the country, in

support of its essential interests; and on the desire uniformly manifested by his Majesty, to effect a pacification on just and honourable grounds with any government in France, under whatever form, which shall appear capable of maintaining the accustomed relations of peace and amity with other countries."

He begged to refer the house to the authentic declarations of parliament and of the crown on this subject, from which it clearly appeared, that his Majesty from the throne had avowed sentiments which they themselves had also stated in speeches in that house, and which he believed, to a greater or less extent, had been adopted by every man in that house and in the country, namely, that it would be a desirable issue of the present state of things, to see the re-establishment of some government in the form of a monarchy in France. His Majesty had declared his desire to co-operate with those who were willing to effect that re-establishment. That nothing was more justifiable, and, under the present circumstances, would be more political, than to direct the efforts of this country to avail itself of any opening in that country, if any there was, to facilitate the re-establishment of some monarchical government, was plain, obvious, and explicit: on the other hand, it was equally clear, that his Majesty's sentiments and the language of parliament were not to be tried by doubtful constructions or plausible misrepresentations, but by the most solemn written documents.

In fact, the restoration of monarchy, upon the old principles, had never been stated by his Majesty, by government, or by parliament, as a *sine quâ non*, as preparatory to peace. Not only so, but it had never been stated, that any one specific and particular form of government was deemed on our part necessary, before we could negociate for peace. It had been stated, that his Majesty had no desire to interfere in the internal affairs of France; and as long as that country had abstained from interfering with the government of other nations, till a direct and absolute aggression had been made on this country, and till hostilities had been actually commenced, his Majesty adhered strictly to that declaration, and abstained from any such interference.

When that interference took place, which was agreeable to every experience and practice of the world, and justifiably on every plain principle of the law of nations, his Majesty still restrained himself to that degree of interference which was necessary for his own security and that of Europe. When his Majesty felt himself under the necessity of looking at the government of France, he looked at it certainly not without a wish which must naturally arise in every generous heart, that it might be adapted for the prosperity and happiness of those who were to live under it. But with a view to negociation and to peace, his Majesty did not look at it with that view, or for that purpose. He could only look at it for English views and for English purposes, to see whether it held out the solid grounds of treating, with any degree of reasonable security, for the performance of engagements that usually subsisted, and was to be found in the existing system of the different powers of Europe, without being liable to that new and unexampled order of things, that state of anarchy and confusion, which had for years existed in France. That having been the true measure and extent of the declarations made by his Majesty and by parliament, he conceived that no man in that house, on looking back to them, would wish he had not made those declarations; that no man would feel they were not made on just principles, or that they did not arise from a fair view of the circumstances and necessity of the case. He had endeavoured to state his amendment almost in the very form of his Majesty's declarations. The honourable gentlemen on the other side of the house were of opinion, that in no case the form of government in another country ought to be considered as having any influence on the security of a treaty, but that we ought only to look to the terms and conditions of the treaty, without regarding the power, the authority, the character, the nature, and circumstances, of the government that made it, or the state of that government. To that doctrine, however, he could never assent. He must contend, that every nation at war with another, ought not to treat for peace with the government that could not give security. He was not ready therefore, to treat with the

present government of France; nor with any government, under any circumstances, or at any time, but such as should appear capable of maintaining the accustomed forms of peace and amity with other nations.

That the situation of France, since the commencement of the present war, had been such, that there did not exist in that country a government capable of maintaining with other nations the accustomed relations he had stated;—that it was in a situation in which no security that could be given to a peace, made it preferable to the continuing of a difficult and hazardous war, was a proposition which he was perfectly prepared to maintain. It was a proposition that had been maintained again and again in that house, and by some of the gentlemen who now seemed to think that treaty ought to be attempted. He conceived, as it appeared on the face of the argument of that day, that the honourable mover and others could not expect any considerable part of the house to agree with them, either in their principles or their conclusions. They set out with observing, that the war was not a war originating in aggression on the part of France, and that we had not that proof of the hostile intentions of France towards this country, which would demonstrate that the war was just and necessary in its origin. It had, as he had just observed that day, been denied that the war commenced by aggression on the part of France: but that in fact it had originated with this country. To such an assertion neither he, nor those who had acted with him, could accede, without sacrificing every principle upon which they had hitherto called for and received the zealous and uniform support of the country. But that was not all. The honourable mover, and those who supported him, must contend, that throughout the whole of the French revolution, from the very commencement of it, during the reigns of the two tyrants, Brissot and Roberspierre, as well as under the present system of moderatism, there was no one period in what was falsely termed the republican government, even in the most bloody part of the reign of Roberspierre, when there was no one pause of anarchy and confusion, even when that goverment was supported by ter-

ror, and declared to be supported by enthusiasm, at the moment when the system of terror was working its own destruction—there was no one period in which the government of France did not possess sufficient stability or authority founded on a permanent basis, in which it did not possess a sufficient community of interest with the people, a sufficient interest in the hearts of the people, a sufficient guard for its own engagements, sufficient power, sufficient moderation of sentiment, to afford this country a rational prospect of security.

From the beginning of the war to that moment, supposing the terms of peace could be settled, we were not, according to the honourable mover, and those who agreed with him, to consider our security as affected by the internal situation of France. The house had not said so: the house had said directly the reverse; and he hoped the house would say the same thing again. Every man in the house and in the country must be satisfied that, in the termination of every war, there were two objects, reparation and security; but the great object was security. Reparation was only an auxiliary, only a subordinate object. Would any man tell him that a nation like France, put into a situation perfectly new, into a situation directly the reverse of all the existing governments on earth, destroying the foundations and the bonds of all political society, breaking down the distinction of all ranks, and subverting the security of property; a government pretending to put a whole nation into a situation of pretended equality, an equality contrary to the physical equality of men—would any man tell him, that we ought to make peace with a government constructed upon such principles, which had attempted, by every means in its power, to molest its neighbours, to impoverish and distress itself; to propagate its pernicious principles; to make converts; and to hold out the means of seducing other nations; and that had followed that up by open and direct acts of aggression, by a positive violation of treaties; and, lastly, by an open declaration of war? This country scrupulously and religiously observed a neutrality, while it could hope, or have a reasonable

prospect, that the mischiefs of the French revolution would be confined within their own territories. We remained passive spectators of the conduct of France, until the very moment that we, against our will, were forced into the contest. And would any man say that it was rational, under any circumstances, to attempt to negociate a peace without taking into consideration the idea of security, the attainment of which, as already observed, was the great and primary object of every war? The whole question was narrowed to a single and a plain point; war being at all times one of the greatest of human evils, and never to be tolerated on any other grounds than that the evils of war were less painful, upon the whole, than the dangers attending an insecure and dishonourable peace. The whole question, from time to time, since the commencement of hostilities, resolved itself into a comparison of these two evils. They must not impiously imagine they could explore the secrets of Providence, and define the precise point to which the fortune of war might compel them; that would be to arrogate more than belongs to human wisdom, and, like other presumptions, must terminate in error and disappointment. They must proceed on general principles, which he could fairly describe. For the application arising from the circumstances, he must refer to the wisdom of parliament. The general principle he had stated was, that they ought not to regard the particular form of the government, but to look to the whole, to all the circumstances, whether it was or was not a government that could give them a reasonable degree of security.

The immediate question between the honourable mover and him was, whether the present circumstances of the internal state and government of France did or did not afford a prospect of sufficient security for a peace, so as to make it wise on the part of this country to negociate it? That was a question of infinite importance. It was, whether the government of France was such, at that moment, as to hold out that degree of reasonable security from any treaty of peace which might be concluded, as to make it, under all the present circum-

stances, preferable to the vigorous prosecution of the war? What did they naturally look to in the state of any country, but to the manner in which they performed their engagements! They looked to their stability—to their apparent authority—and to the reliance they could place in their pacific dispositions. He would not dwell on these circumstances. Let them recollect what had been generated under that system, and those principles that were now prevalent in France. They had seen them producing and exhibiting, hitherto, not a government, but a succession and series of revolutions, for that was the proper situation in which France had stood since the commencement of the present war. The terror of this revolution had been suspended a little more than six months. They had seen the reign and fall of Brissot; they had seen the reign and fall of Roberspierre; and they now saw the prevalence of a system that was called moderatism. They had to recollect that gentlemen on the other side of the house held out to them the same sort of arguments for entering into a treaty with France, almost on the extinction of these two tyrants. Arguments were then produced of the stability of the government; and they now saw what was the ground of security, and how much they ought to depend on such arguments. But he did not wish to rest the question solely on the ground of so many successive changes, but whether the manner in which they had cried up the sovereignty of the people, whether the manner in which the pride and passions of the populace had been erected into the criterion and rule of government, afforded any rational ground of security to any peace that could possibly be made. If that was not so, what were the particular grounds of permanence now existing in France, that ought to give us dependence on its stability more than formerly, in the time of Brissot and Roberspierre? The mere question of moderatism would not be sufficient for that purpose. Though there was some relaxation of the severity and terror of former times, that would not be suffi-

cient. It was a moderation which arose only from comparison. The system of revolutionary tribunals was not varied. That great leading article, on which the happiness of the people so materially depended, was not essentially varied, whatever it might be in mode or degree. He said he would not tire the house on that subject, but examine what were the leading points to which they ought to turn their attention. Some of them had been enumerated by a noble friend of his *, at the beginning of last session, with a force of language and of argument which had made too strong an impression upon the minds of those who heard him to be readily forgotten. He had then most clearly shewed the influence of public opinion, as unfavourable to the permanence of the government, and paving the way for its destruction. He said he mentioned this for the purpose of shewing, that when the power of Robespierre was at its height, it was understood, by the other side of the house, as a powerful argument of the great stability of the government. That tyrant possessed the greatest degree of power and terror that ever existed; whereas the present rulers of France, being disarmed of that force, had only the chance of being supported by the opinion of the people. Look at the manner in which the revenue was at present collected in France. Did the present government recommend itself by the greater moderation of the means it used? Within a little more than a year and a half, the confiscations that took place in that devoted country, and which were the resources of the present government, exceeded THREE HUNDRED MILLIONS STERLING! That was the amount of the confiscations from May 1793, to the month of May last. And these confiscations were founded on what?—Upon that which would be looked upon by a British house of commons, and by this country in general, with horror. That immense sum did not arise from seizing the fortunes of exiled nobles and emigrants, but from confiscations made long after. They had seized as

* Lord Mornington.

forfeitures the property of all persons who remained in the country, but who were possessed of landed estates, and had shewn the smallest dislike to the revolution. Having exiled the whole nobility and great landed proprietors in the course of a year and a half, they had, after that, collected that great sum. Whether the charge of guilt, upon which that confiscation had been grounded, had been falsely or truly applied, it equally made for his argument. In one view, it furnished the strongest proof of oppression in consequence of the system of terror; and if it was considered in another view, it was an incontestible proof of the division of the sentiments of the people of France, which contradicted the observations of the honourable mover, who talked in such strong terms of that united people, although three hundred millions sterling were wrested from those persons who did not admire the principles of the revolution. Taken in the other view, it might be considered as the fruits of the bloody massacres that took place under the dominion of Roberspierre. It would appear then, what weight was due to the assertion, that all the French were united in one cause, when the great resources by which they had been able to carry on the war, had been derived almost entirely from the fund of confiscation and proscription, and had been the fruits and harvest of the bloody massacres which had marked the different periods of their revolution, and consisted of that system, on their professed detestation of which they built their power, and by the destruction of which alone, they attempted to support it, and acquire the confidence, affection, and good-will of the country. If these had hitherto formed its principal resources, in renouncing the system of Roberspierre, the present government had crippled their power of action, and deprived themselves of the means of exertion.

Mr. Pitt next called the attention of the house to the state of the agriculture and commerce of France. He said he wished to describe the present state of the agriculture and commerce of that country, not from any reports which the honourable mover might suppose had come to his hands from

those who were friendly to him: his reporters were certainly not persons immediately dependant on him, or those who had any good-will towards him. They were the members of the national convention of France, who made reports to that assembly from the several committees. According to those reports, their agriculture was *extinguished*; their commerce *annihilated*. That was the situation in which France stood. They had declared they were willing to re-animate commerce: but the present actual situation of the country was such as he had described. See whether, in fact, they had afforded any relief to commerce, and to the agriculture of the country, and whether they had any just title to the love and affection of the bulk of the people.

He next adverted to the state of justice in the country. All sanguinary cruelties had been committed through the medium of revolutionary tribunals: and though they were less cruel under the present government, they were only so by comparison with the former system, properly denominated the system of terror.

He desired the house to look at the state of religion in France, and asked them if they would willingly treat with a nation of atheists. He did not wish to consider them in that point of view. God forbid, that we should look on the body of the people of France as atheists, whatever might be the case with some individuals! It was not possible that a whole nation, in so short a time, should have renounced the religion of their fathers, forgotten all the principles in which they had been educated, extinguished the feelings of nature, and subdued the workings of conscience. To the larger proportion of the mass, there could not be a heavier burden than to be deprived of the exercise of that religion, and to be deprived of it in a country that called itself a land of liberty, and which set out on the principles of toleration, in a country which supposed itself to enjoy more than human liberty; and yet, under the present *moderate* government, he believed a proposition had been made, to solemnize the Christian reli-

gion; when the convention passed to the order of the day, proposing forthwith to establish a plan of decadal pagan festivals, and accompanied by a declaration, that all the priests should be detained in prison till that new religion was established. Although the present convention of France profess to have renounced the crimes and cruelties of their predecessors, yet, since they had been in a state of pure innocence, had there been more apparent unanimity among those in whom the present government subsisted? On the contrary, there never had been stronger instances of opposition, distraction and confusion. They were continually recriminating on each other the guilt of those very cruelties he had been stating. Did he say then that the present system of government in France must necessarily fall? He said no such thing. Did he then say that the present rulers of France might not extricate themselves in some degree from that abuse, and follow a more just and prudent line; and that they might not gradually draw a veil over former severities, by which, if they could not gain the good opinion and confidence of others, they might at least obtain their acquiescence? They certainly might. Had that time arrived? Undoubtedly it had not. But if such a change should take place, and such an order of things should arrive, through whatever road, and by whatever means, if they gave to their government that stability and that authority which might afford grounds, not of certainty, but of moral probability (by which human affairs must be conducted) that we might treat for peace with security, then would be the proper time to negociate; but we ought in prudence to wait the return of such circumstances as would afford us a probability of treating with success. So much on that part of the subject.

Supposing, however, that he did not look to the chance of a change, the next thing was, what assurance had we of the pacific disposition of the present national convention of France toward this country? We had reasons, founded on probability, to infer that they entertained a spirit of hostility

to all regular governments, and most of all to the government of Great Britain. If they had any reason to believe that the convention of France were disposed to peace, must he not infer that they were disposed to it, because they thought it would most probably tend to their advantage, and to our ruin? Till there was satisfactory evidence that their spirit of hostility to other nations was destroyed, he saw probable ground, in the very nature of their system, that they must persevere in that hostility, till they ceased to act upon it. They looked upon their own government as the only lawful government in the world, and regarded the governments of all other nations as usurpation. Such was the ground on which they had undertaken the war. Did France make any professions of peace, or did she shew any dispositions for peace, but as she felt herself wearied of the war, and as she found herself involved in difficulties? The national convention had said plainly they desired a partial peace, because so extensive a war they found themselves unequal to prosecute. They had professed they desired peace with some of the powers, in order to ruin more securely those against whom they wished still to carry on the war; and he might add, afterwards to ruin those with whom now they professed to be willing to treat for peace. They would make a distinction in making peace. Their moderation was reserved for Holland, their vindictive principles for Great Britain. Could such dispositions either give security to peace, or render it of long continuance.

It had been stated, that the decree of the 19th of November had been repealed, and that therefore the French no longer aspired at interfering with the internal government of other countries. In April 1793, they had enacted something on the subject of peace. They enacted that the penalty of death should be inflicted on any person who should propose peace with any country, unless that country acknowledged the French republic, one and indivisible, founded on the principles of liberty and equality. They were not merely satisfied with a partial acknowledgment *de facto;* they required an ac-

knowledgment *de jure*. He wished to know, if these principles were once recognized as the legitimate foundation of government, whether they would not be universal in their application? Could these principles be excluded from other nations? And if they could not, would they not amount to a confession of the usurpation and injustice of every other government? If they were to treat for peace with France, they knew one of the things that must be preparatory to it, and that was, that they would acknowledge what they had hitherto denied. They must acknowledge those principles which condemned the usurpation of all the other governments, and denied the very power they were exercising. Such was the preliminary that must precede a proposal to treat; and what next would happen if peace was obtained?—Leaving out all consideration of the terms of it, which might be expected to be high in proportion to their acquisition of territory. Did they look at the situation in which they would lay open this country to all the emissaries of France? In proportion to the success of France, those principles had grown more bold in this, and in every other country. They had increased in activity and means of resistance. Were they to give up those safeguards which had been lately thrown round the constitution; and were they to follow the advice of the other side of the house by having recourse to the universal loyalty of the people of England? Did gentlemen think that we ran no risk of serious internal dangers by reviving and rekindling the embers of that faction in this country, which the other side of the house had supposed were now totally extinguished? Peace obtained under such circumstances, could not be stated with confidence as to its permanence, and therefore, if it were to be obtained, we must remain in a state of vigilant jealousy and never-ceasing suspicion. In that state, what sort of peace could we enjoy?—Could such a state possibly be preferable to war?—Would they not then give up those advantages they enjoyed? Were the country to disarm, few, he supposed, would be inclined to approve of that alternative;

on the other hand, they could not remain armed without giving up, in a certain degree, that pitch of force, to which they had brought the exertions of the country, and retaining an establishment burthensome to peace, and ineffectual to war. It was impossible for any human being, in the present circumstances, to suppose a state of settled peace; it must be a state of watching each other, of inquietude, of distrust, merely a short truce, a state of partial inactivity and interrupted repose. In such a peace there could be no security; it was exposed to so much hazard, doubt, and danger, that no man could possibly look to it, except the exhausted state of our resources was such as to exclude the possibility of further exertion. The question was not the option between peace and war, but the option of war under considerable difficulties, with great means and resources, or peace without security.

He said he should be ashamed to go over the means of our resources; but as that object had been touched on by the honourable gentleman who had introduced the question, he must say a few words on the relative situation of the two countries. The foundation of the argument of the honourable mover was, that the resources of France were of so extraordinary a nature, that they were such as the other nations of Europe could not bear, but France, having borne them for so many years, could do that which other nations could not do—and that they were therefore bound to suppose that the resources of France were superior to those of this country, which had expended so many millions without having had any effect on the revenue, commerce, and manufactures of the country, without means that were equal to the pressure sustained in other wars where this country had carried them on successfully. The honourable gentleman, who swept off millions from the expenditure of France, had added them with as rude a hand to the account of this country; he had said, if we were to make peace at that moment, the expense would be seventy millions sterling, and the extra expenses would be calculated moderately at fifty millions sterling. How much the honour,

able gentleman allowed for winding up expenses he knew not, but they were certainly large. Without taking in the expenses of the present year of 220,000 men, including the regular army and militia, and the vote of 100,000 seamen, to the best of his recollection,—taking the expenses of the year 1793 and of 1794 up to the end of last December, the sum was about twenty-five millions sterling, and there was a capital to be created, of somewhat more than thirty millions. This point was not very closely connected with the question, but he had corrected the statement of the honourable gentleman, who wished to shew we were no longer able to carry on the war, though he could not prove the least defalcation in the revenue of the country, or a diminution of the public credit. To what was that sum to be opposed on the part of France? To 260 millions sterling, which that country had expended during the last two years. Would any man say that France could afford to spend 260 millions sterling, of which the inhabitants had been plundered, better than Great Britain? That immense sum had been collected in France by force and terror, and had been attended by effects admitted by themselves to produce the desolation of the interior of the country, the extinction of agriculture, the ruin of their resources, the subversion of all the means of profitable industry, and the annihilation of every branch of commerce, besides the collateral circumstance of the system of assignats, which he had mentioned on a former day. He said, on a former day he had made the expenses of the French republic amount to 480 millions sterling, which the honourable gentleman who had made the motion said was exaggerated by 120 millions. But the honourable gentleman had begun his calculations two years later than he, which was the reason of that difference. The assignats, which were formerly near par, were now about 85 per cent. below it. That the house might not mistake him, they were not worth 85*l.* per cent. but only 15*l.* per cent. And therefore he repeated his former assertion, that there was a rapid and a progressive decay in the internal resources of France.

It had been stated, that he had year after year represented the resources of France to be in a rapid state of decline. The first year of the war cost France 160 millions, which produced a rapid and progressive decay in the state of their finances; and was there any thing ridiculous in supposing those resources to be still in a progressive state of decay, after they had expended, during the last campaign, another 160 millions sterling?

The honourable gentleman* who seconded the motion, in the longest simile he had ever heard, observed, that the resources of America were declining for three years together. But would any man say that the features of that war bore any resemblance to those of the present, which marked the calamities of France? It had been observed, that the French were making great exertions, and that therefore it was unjust to say their resources were at all decayed. But the question was, whether those great exertions ought not to be considered as a proof of the decay of the resources of the country? Would any man tell him that the internal state of the country would not be affected by a continued and extraordinary supply of the nerves and sinews of war? The honourable gentleman who made the motion, had stated that the French had extended their conquests from Gibraltar to the Baltic. But no brilliant success, no acquisition of territory, was sufficient to compensate this internal decay of resources. The wide difference, in point of resources, was as important to the fate of empires and the lot of kingdoms, as new conquest; and the balance there was as much in our favour, as the acquisition of territory was against other countries, and in favour of France.

There were many other points on which he wished to touch, but would not discuss them at length. One or two observations he could not help stating. It had been asked, what force had we to oppose to that of France? He answered, an increased force on the part of this country. The convention had said that their forces must be contracted: their efforts must therefore be

* Mr. W. Smith.

exhausted. Besides the exertions by sea and land which had been made by this country, it would probably depend on the resolution and firmness of that house, whether the emperor might not be enabled to bring such a military force into the field, as would render an extent of exertion necessary on the part of France, of which they had declared themselves incapable. It was said, do you expect to conquer France? do you expect a counter-revolution? When do you intend to march to Paris? If such was at one time our success in France, that the convention were put in imminent fear of the combined armies penetrating to Paris, it was not very extraordinary that his honourable friend* at London should allow himself to entertain a degree of hope of the possibility of that event. By a mode of arguing, not unusual with gentlemen on the other side, whose practice it frequently was, first to state positions in order that they afterwards might combat them, ministers had been charged with looking to the conquest of France. They had never held out any such object; they had only professed their hope of making such an impression upon the interior of that country as might lead to a secure and stable peace; and of being able, by the assistance of those well-disposed persons who were enemies to the present system, to establish a government honourable to them and safe to ourselves. If a change had taken place in the government of France, which rendered it more expedient for us to treat in the present than at a former period, he would ask, if nothing had been gained? We were now in a situation less remote from that in which we might be able to treat with security. It had been urged, that we ought to have let France alone. What was the consequence of neutrality but to produce aggression? But now that war had been two years carried on, the detestable system of their government had subsided into a state of less flagrant atrocity. It had been said that all France, to a man, was united for a republic. What was meant by the phrase of a republic? Was it merely a name at the top of a sheet of paper? Was their

* Mr. Jenkinson.

desire of a republic to be gathered from their submission to the tyranny of Robespierre? Was their unanimity to be inferred from the numerous proscriptions and massacres of federalists and royalists?

Mr. Pitt proceeded to recapitulate the general grounds on which he had opposed the original resolution, and the motives from which he had been induced to bring forward the amendment, which he had read, and should conclude with moving. Peace! Peace was not obstructed by any form of government; but by a consideration of the internal circumstances of France. He remarked that there had been great misconstructions and misconceptions with respect to what he had stated on former occasions to be his sentiments, as to the re-establishment of monarchy, which he by no means wished to be considered as a *sine quâ non* to the attainment of peace, and therefore he had not contented himself with barely negativing the resolution, but had been induced in the amendment to substitute that language which, in his mind, it became parliament to hold, as best adapted to the subject.

There was one other consideration to which he should advert, namely, the remark that the attempt to treat, though not likely to be successful, would yet be attended with advantage, both in France and this country. In France it would shew that we were disposed to treat. If it were wise to treat, this certainly would be an advantage, but such a conduct, instead of forwarding peace, would only be productive of danger, it would lead to a proposition of terms from France, elated by its recent acquisitions, which it would be impossible for this country to accept. And he trusted that his honourable friend*, who had, he conceived, gone too far in his propositions with respect to peace on a former occasion, would be convinced, upon his own principles, that as the difficulty increased, any proposition to treat in the present moment would have the effect to encourage the enemy, and to bury the remains of opposition in

* Mr. Wilberforce.

France. In this country it would have the effect to sink the spirit of the people, and to tell them that it was right to look for peace, though it was impossible to look for security; it would be to insinuate a doubt of their zeal, energy, and courage, and to add to the depression already produced by a succession of misfortunes and a series of misrepresentations. The honourable gentleman had said, that if his proposition to treat should not in the event be successful, he would then support the war. Upon what ground could he support a war, which he had in the first instance conceived and declared to be neither necessary nor just? But till the period should arrive at which it would be possible to treat, with a rational prospect of security, and a degree of, at least, probable advantage, he, and those who thought with him, must continue to support a war, of the justice and necessity of which, they were firmly persuaded, and which they could not, in the present moment, abandon without a sacrifice of their opinion, their consistency, and their honour.

The original motion was negatived;

Ayes 86
Noes 269

and Mr. Pitt's amendment was afterwards adopted.

May 27, 1795.

ON a motion by Mr. Wilberforce, "That it is the opinion of this House, that the present circumstances of France ought not to preclude the government of this country from entertaining proposals for a general pacification; and that it is for the interest of Great Britain to make peace with France, provided it can be effected on fair terms, and in an honourable manner;"

Mr. PITT delivered his sentiments as follows:

I shall certainly endeavour, Sir, to confine what I have to say to the real point under consideration, and must stand excused if I do not follow the right honourable gentleman* who

* Mr. Fox.

spoke last, in many of the points to which he adverted. I impute no blame to my honourable friend who has made this motion, though I lament and deplore that he has done so. He has acted, no doubt, from the fullest conviction that he was discharging his duty to his constituents and to the public at large. A great deal has been said this night about Holland being lost, without taking into consideration all the circumstances that belong to the case. It is not my business at present, but at any other time I should not be unwilling to discuss, whether it was not of immense advantage to Europe in general, that Holland was not added to France without a struggle, and which, but for the interference of this country, would have taken place two years ago. This union, after a long struggle, unfortunate I admit in the issue, has been formed chiefly from that country indulging unfounded hopes of peace, in a treaty of alliance, which has ended in their having been invaded and conquered; in their having submitted, being promised protection, and having been defrauded of four millions of money. Perhaps it may be better for them in the end, but it is certainly better for the state of the world, however unfortunate it may be for the inhabitants of that country, at the present moment, that they were united to France after a severe and unsuccessful struggle, and when Holland is no great acquisition to France, instead of being added to her, as a great accession, when she was in the zenith of her power. It has been argued this night, that this country entered upon the present just and necessary war with a great and powerful confederacy in Europe; and I admit that this confederacy is narrowed and diminished. But I would ask, whether, in discussing the question of peace and war, we have not furnished them with grounds to argue upon, which it is impossible they could have had without the existence of that confederacy? To look for negociation at the present moment is premature, though I look to it at no remote period. I have no objection, were it connected with this business, to follow my honourable friend, and the right honourable

gentleman, to the West Indies, to examine the efforts that have been made by this country, and compare them with those made in any former period; from which we should clearly see, whether greater exertions had ever been made, and whether the distresses in that quarter had not been aggravated by a great mortality, and other accidental causes.

But I come to the question immediately before us. I beg leave to consider what that question is, and I must say, that my honourable friend, in making his motion, suffered himself to be deceived in the manner of stating it; and this pervaded the whole of his argument. His statement was neither more nor less than this: Is a peace on fair and honourable terms preferable to the continuance of the war? We should not have been debating here so long, if this were the question; about this there can be no difference of opinion. But the question is, whether a peace on fair and honourable terms, which is the end of all war, is more likely to be attained by negociation at the present moment, than by a continuance of the war? Are you more likely to arrive at a better and more secure peace with a reasonable prospect of permanency on fair and honourable terms, by a continuance of the war with energy and vigour, till a more favourable opening presents itself, by taking some step or other to encourage and invite negociation? That is the question which puts away at once all the declamations on the advantages of peace, which nobody in this country will deny;—where the rapid effects of peace have healed wounds, infinitely greater than any we have experienced since the commencement of the present war, in repairing losses far more affecting the prosperity of the country than any we have sustained, and which were so vigorously experienced in the interval of a few years, as to make us almost forget the calamities of former wars.

Sir, that being the state of the question, I mean to submit to the house, that at the present moment, perseverance in the contest is more wise and prudent, and more likely in the end

to effect a safe, lasting, and honourable peace, than any attempt at negociation. My honourable friend does not chuse to state that this country ought to take the first steps to peace, and he claims great merit for his moderation in not going so far, but only that ministers ought to receive overtures. I beg leave to submit, whether this be not only taking the first step, but doing it in the most exceptionable manner. To say it is not an overture on our part, if we have received no intimation whatever from the government of France to treat, to say we shall be glad to treat, is what no man living will contend. Where the overture comes from the legislature of the country, it is attended with a degree of publicity which the right honourable gentleman admits is one of the merits of our constitution. But surely this mode of making overtures of peace is not the most convenient, inasmuch as it makes known the whole terms of peace to the enemy. It leaves no will to ministers to take advantage of any favourable circumstances that may occur. For that reason it is that the legislature does not usually interfere in such transactions, as the true state of the transactions is only fully understood by a few, and therefore it has been wisely committed to the executive government. Why has this country, which is so jealous of its rights and liberties, entrusted such prerogatives to the crown? Why is the making of peace and war, and other prerogatives which form the happiness of this constitution, entrusted to the king? Because it has been found, that the power of parliament was sufficient to prevent the royal prerogative from being carried beyond its proper limits. I say the question is then, whether you will step forward, and assume this power of the crown at a crisis of peculiar delicacy?

The right honourable gentleman who spoke last, was of opinion that the French convention, from the publicity of its proceedings, bore a nearer resemblance to the British constitution, than the constitution of any other country. In this comparison, I trust, it was not meant to be carried any farther, as if

the interests of this country were to be discussed in one popular assembly. I hope the right honourable gentleman is not so much in love with France. I think the right honourable gentleman took up that idea rather hastily. I am by no means certain, nor is it worth while here to examine, whether a despotic government, or an anarchical republic, like that of France, most nearly resembles the constitution of Great Britain, which is removed at an equal distance from both extremes.

The publicity of the proceedings of the French convention, has been the source of outrage, horror, and disgust, to every feeling heart. That publicity has been a faithful recorder, and an accurate witness of the enormity of their proceedings. The question is, whether we are to take the first step towards negociation, or to go on, trusting to the executive government to take the opportunity of the first favourable moment for negociation, and in the mean time strengthening the hands of that government, to persevere with vigour in the contest in which we are engaged. We have been told, that although this question has been several times brought forward, it has never been directly disposed of; it has never been directly negatived. I contend that it has in effect been directly negatived. For when the motion was made some time ago, an amendment was made to the motion, stating, that we were resolved to persevere in the contest, trusting that his Majesty would seize the first favourable opportunity that presented for treating with security. I beg to know, whether that which was done with deliberation, was not negativing the motion. Subsequent to that, this question was discussed again and again, and this house on those occasions came to a resolution, that it did not conceive, under the present circumstances of the countries, negociation was a measure expedient to be adopted.

But another question here arises. Have the circumstances and situation of the country materially altered since the last motion on the subject, or since my honourable friend first found himself an advocate for negociation? Has the posture

of affairs varied since that time, so as to make negociation more eligible at the present moment than it was at any former period? I heard my honourable friend state one fact on this business, which no evidence can contradict. I heard him with pleasure state, that the situation of France was now so weakened and exhausted, as to make peace with that government, though not secure, yet, in consequence of that weakness, attended with a considerable degree of security. That something more of this security exists at the present moment, I not only admit, but contend that the prospect is improving every day, and that this becomes more and more ascertained; as I shall state before I sit down. But is this a reason why we should negociate at this moment? I think not. From facts that are notorious, from things known to the world, there is now a general feeling that there is, comparatively speaking, a sense of security in the country, when compared with the alarming uneasiness which some time ago prevailed. The enemy have not been able to avail themselves of their success and acquisitions, nor have they acquired solid and substantial strength. The natural anxiety of the people of this country has led them to remark the progress of the decay, decline, and ruin of the enemy, as being more rapid than they could have foreseen. When this business was formerly discussed, it was used as a very considerable argument against negociation, that from our situation then, we could not hope to treat with France on terms of equality: that our affairs since the commencement of the war were in so unfavourable a state, that we could not reasonably hope to obtain terms of equality, or any thing fair and honourable. Is not this argument very considerably strengthened at this moment, when you compare the state of this country and France? Exhausted and wearied with the addition of your own weakness, will you give up the contest in despair? We should then, like Holland, have to consider what indemnity France would expect of us. I state this as a practical objection, and wholly independent of any question on the security of negociation. Those who argue for peace, con-

sider our situation as rendered more fit for negociation in this way:—that we have lost our allies, by which we are reduced to such a state of weakness, that we must listen to peace; and now that our allies have deserted us, it is unnecessary to obtain their consent. We formerly refused to treat with France, because we were satisfied she was unable to maintain that peace and amity that ought to prevail among neutral nations. Gentlemen have chosen to forget all the arguments used with regard to acknowledging the republic of France. We refused to treat with M. Chauvelin after the unfortunate murder of Louis XVI. We refused to acknowledge a government that had been reeking with the blood of their sovereign. Was not that an objection not to acknowledge them at that period? The murder of the king preceded but a very few days the declaration of war against this country.

The next argument is, whether you would dishonour yourself by acknowledging a republic that might endanger your own independence, and which made a public profession of principles which went to destroy the independence of every nation of Europe? I say, I will not acknowledge such a republic. The question here is but simply whether you will acknowledge so as to treat with it? It is not, nor has it been, since the commencement of the war, the interest of England, not from any one circumstance, but from taking all circumstances together, to institute a negociation with the ruling powers now existing in France.

As to the declaration of the emperor to the diet, if it is authentic, that he should be happy to enter into a negociation for peace, I beg leave to say, this declaration must be supposed to bind the emperor in no other capacity than as head of the empire; and I am sure they cannot, and will not state that that precludes him, as duke of Austria, or king of Bohemia, from performing any agreement he may chuse to enter into, on his own separate account, in those capacities. As the head of the empire, he might, from the present situation of that country, think it wise and expedient to go beyond the line he may chalk out to himself as a sovereign prince and king, as king of Bohe-

mia and archduke of Austria. There may be circumstances to induce him, as the head of the empire, to wish to open a negociation with France, rather than run the risk of a separate negociation, through the medium of the king of Prussia, contrary to the constitution of the Germanic body. One of the next points relied upon, and imputed as blame to ministers, was the circumstance of the war in La Vendée and with the Chouans being at an end. I do not see how that circumstance can attach any blame to government. It has been stated, that the inhabitants of La Vendée have submitted to the French republic. Whoever has conversed with gentlemen coming from France, has been made acquainted with the situation of the inhabitants of La Vendée and the Chouans, as well as from the Paris newspapers. They will do well to consider, whether the French government can have any degree of confidence, that they can reap the least advantage from that union. The advantages of the peace in that quarter have been entirely in favour of La Vendée and Britanny, and not of the republic; the inhabitants have gained by the treaty, and lost nothing. The republic has no right to any accession of strength from this district of the kingdom. Were they subject to requisitions? or did they furnish recruits for the army? or did they increase the treasure of the country? By the articles of their submission to the laws of the republic, if they are reported truly, they are in fact an independent government, from which what are called patriots are excluded. The state of La Vendée was directly the reverse of that of Holland; and if that country was not an accession of strength to the republic, is it not a confession of the weakness of the government, that they found themselves under the necessity, notwithstanding all their splendid success, to enter into such a treaty as a sovereign would never have entered into but from necessity?

There is another circumstance which has been relied upon, and which I must not pass over in silence. Among other events of the day, we see that Holland and France have entered into an alliance; and that Holland is to furnish France with twelve ships of the line, and eighteen frigates. The present state of

Holland makes that circumstance more favourable for this country than we had reason to expect it would have been when Holland was over-run by the French.

"The question is, whether the state of France is not so weak; whether the distractions and disturbances of the country, and the discontents of the people, are not so great, as are likely to lead to some change or new order of things, more favourable than any that has hitherto appeared?

First, as to the weakness of France. We have been told by the right honourable gentleman, that there was no appearance in France of the relaxation of its efforts; that the reign of terror ended with the month of July last; and subsequent to that period they have been as successful as ever. But surely it is not very wonderful if the operations of that great and extraordinary machine had wound up the whole of that extensive empire, by all the men who were put in a state of requisition, and by all the meretricious treasure that was amassed; if so many causes operating so long, the effects were not to cease as immediately as the causes. The effects in their operation survive the causes: but have the French acquired fresh vigour? Whoever has taken any pains to look at the number and efforts of their armies, and state of the provisions and magazines, and attends to the manner in which requisitions have been carried on; whoever reads the accounts the members of the convention give of themselves; whoever reads their speeches; whoever trusts to their own account of themselves;—these all prove that the vigour and exertion of that country have been evidently diminishing.

In the next place, look at the state of their assignats, which for a long time has been the subject of a great deal of anxious attention to the convention. They have been employed almost in a perpetual contest about two things,—to make a constitution, and to raise their credit, by preventing an unlimited number of assignats entering into circulation. They therefore passed a decree to withdraw a certain number of them to raise their credit. The nominal value of assignats was only 25*l.* per cent. At present they are somewhat less than 5*l.* per cent. Their expendi-

ture is incredible; last month it amounted to twenty-seven millions sterling, which is more than is wanted by Great Britain in the course of a year. This expense amounts to three hundred and twenty-four millions sterling per annum, which exceeds the whole national debt of Great Britain. The commerce of that country is totally extinguished, and a portion of bankruptcy mixes itself with every transaction.

The next article is the price of provisions, respecting which I have received a great deal of authentic information within these few days, indeed I may say within these few hours; and the price of provisions is so very high, and scarcity prevails to such a degree, as must stop all great and extensive operations.

In the next place, I doubt very much whether the provisions for the French army and navy will in future be so regularly supplied as they formerly have been. I have accounts of provisions being re-landed from on board some of the ships at Brest; and the city of Paris has been supplied by pittances from the army on the Rhine. Expressions of discontent are not confined to individuals, but are general, and such as come home to the door of every individual in France. What will be the effect of this complicated pressure, how long it may be continued, or what order of things may ultimately rise out of it, I shall not pretend to say. But I think it may produce, and probably at no great distance of time, some new order of things, more friendly to a general pacification, and to a regular intercourse with the other established powers of Europe. Such is the genuine prospect for all the countries of Europe, for an order of things more satisfactory than we have seen at any former period. It is owing to your perseverance in forcing them, and to which they are unequal, that they would willingly accept of peace. But because you have such a prospect at this moment, you are by no means certain that a safe and honourable peace could be obtained. That is, at this moment, premature; a continuance of your perseverance some time longer, will in all probability produce that happy effect.

Compare the situation and resources of this country, feeling for the burthens of the country, which must be felt by the poor and industrious to a certain extent, and deploring their necessity, as they must obstruct the increasing wealth of the country. Look also at the manufactures and trade and revenue, and compare it with the expense of the war. Compare the annual expenditure of twenty or twenty-five millions sterling, to the enormous sum of twenty-seven millions sterling per month, or three hundred and twenty-four millions per annum, the sum yearly expended by France. After you have made these comparisons, tell me whether you will lay aside your exertions, under the peculiar circumstances in which you are now placed. You have laid on taxes unprecedented in their amount, but at the same time having the satisfaction to know that they are borne by the inhabitants of this country without any material severe pressure. You are provided therefore with the most ample and liberal supplies for the present campaign. But is that the case with France? No. Every month, every week, is an additional strain of the new machine, and they are not provided with any of that enormous expense which I have mentioned, but must raise it all by forced means, by requisitions, by robbery, and plunder. I have trespassed too long on the patience of the house. I conclude by observing again, that I have to hope for a more favourable order of things, and I have no reason to be satisfied with any attempt at negociation at this moment: but by a vigorous prosecution of the war for a short time longer, we have every reasonable prospect that we shall be able to procure for ourselves a solid, permanent, and honourable peace.

The resolution was rejected: the House dividing on the order of the day, moved by Mr. Windham,

Ayes 201
Noes 86

November 10, 1795.

The House having proceeded to the order of the day for taking into consideration his Majesty's late proclamation against seditious meetings.

Mr. Pitt rose and said,

That the circumstances, upon which he meant to ground the proceedings of that night had made so deep an impression on the mind of every gentleman in that house, as well as on that of every man in the country, that it would not be necessary for him to make any comments on them. The public had seen with becoming indignation, that a virtuous and beloved sovereign had been attacked in the most criminal and outrageous manner, and at a time too when he was in the exercise of the greatest and most important function of kingly capacity, when he was going to assemble the great council of the nation; that great, and indeed only resource against every national evil. The first impulses of every man's mind, after an attack so immediately directed against the life of the king of these realms, must be those of horror and detestation of the wicked, the diabolical wretches, who in contempt of the respect and reverence due to the sacred character of their sovereign—in contempt of the whole legislature, by a kind of concentred malice, directed a blow at once at its three branches, in attempting to assassinate a mild and benignant monarch, who was the great cement and centre of our glorious constitution. In contemplating this calamity, the house would feel that some correction must be given to the laws, at present in force against such crimes; means must be found to repress the spirit which gave birth to so daring an outrage, and to prevent such unprecedented consequences of sedition, and of sedition too leading to assassination by the most despicable, as well as the most dangerous of all modes of attack, against the vital principles of the state, in the person of the sovereign.

If, under this first impression, every man should think him-

self called upon, (as he was sure would be the case) by the loyalty and allegiance he owed to the sovereign office, and by affection to the person of the sovereign, by the reverence due to religion, by self-preservation itself, and the happiness of society at large, to apply a remedy to those very alarming symptoms, another impression would arise out of it, equally forcible, and equally obvious, namely, that they would do this business but by halves, and act carelessly and ineffectually, if they directed their attention only to that separate act, and not to those very mischievous and formidable circumstances, which were connected with it, in point of principles, and which produced it, in point of fact.

In endeavouring to lead the attention of the house to the remedies, which appeared to him most likely to be efficient to this purpose, he would not advert to legal distinctions, but to prudential principles. If the house viewed the separate act with that eye of horror he conceived they must, and if, viewing it so, they felt the conviction, that a repetition of such enormities should be prevented immediately; the next point, that would impress itself upon their minds, as arising from the two former, was, that they should adopt some means to prevent these seditious assemblies, which served as vehicles to faction and disloyalty, which fanned and kept alive the flame of disaffection, and filled the minds of the people with discontent. He had the most indubitable proof to support him in saying, that this sentiment pervaded not only that house, but all the kingdom; and that in no one instance which had ever occurred, were the commons called upon more loudly by the wishes and prayers of an anxious community, than they were at this time by the whole people of England, to avert the ruin with which those assemblies menaced the country, by preventing their further proceedings. In full hopes that the house felt the force of these impressions as forcibly as he did, and would agree to some such measure as he had alluded to, his motion of that day would go to that object. It might, perhaps, occur to gentlemen, that a law should be previously

made for the protection of his Majesty's person; but he informed them, that the other house had now under its consideration a bill to that effect, which he hoped would soon be laid before them for their concurrence. His motion, therefore, was not directed to alter or enforce the laws of the king's safety, but to prevent those meetings, to which all the mischiefs he had mentioned were attributable.

The meetings to which he alluded were, he said, of two descriptions; under the first of those descriptions, fell those meetings which, under a pretext (to which they by no means adhered) of petitioning parliament for rights of which they affected to be deprived, agitated questions, and promulgated opinions and insinuations hostile to the existing government, and tending to bring it into disrepute with the people. The other description, though less numerous, not less public, nor less dangerous, were concerted evidently for the purpose of disseminating unjust grounds of jealousy, discontent, and false complaints, against the constitution; of irritating the minds of the people against their lawful governors; and of encouraging them to acts of even treason itself. In these meetings, every thing that could create faction, every thing that could excite disloyalty, every thing that could prepare the minds of those who attended for rebellion, was industriously circulated. Both these required some strong law to prevent them; for, if the arm of the executive government was not strengthened by such a law, they would be continued, if not to the utter ruin, certainly to the indelible disgrace of the country.

As to the first of those descriptions, no one would venture to deny the right of the people to express their opinions on political men and measures, and to discuss and assert their right of petitioning all the branches of the legislature; nor was there any man who would be farther from encroaching on that right than himself. It was undoubtedly a most valuable privilege, of which nothing should deprive them. But on the other hand, if meetings of this kind were made the mere cover or the pretext for acts which were as inconsistent with the liberty of the sub-

ject as it was possible to imagine any thing to be; if, instead of stating grievances, the people were excited to rebellion; if, instead of favouring the principles of freedom, the very foundation of it was to be destroyed, and with it the happiness of the people; it was high time for the legislature to interpose with its authority.

This consideration, he confessed, occasioned considerable difficulty, but it did not create an insuperable dilemma. In applying the desired remedy, two things were to be looked to—the first, to correct the abuse of a sacred and invaluable privilege; the second, to preserve that privilege inviolate: caution, was therefore necessary, lest, on the one hand, they should encroach on the rights of the people, or, on the other, should suffer the abuse of those rights to become the instrument of their total extinction. This was a matter of great delicacy, and should be attended to in the detail; but the house would see, that at present the real question was, did not the pressure of the moment call for *some* remedy?

According to the opinions which he had collected, as well as he had been able, from others, and such as he had formed for himself, the great point wanted at this moment was a more clear and defined power in the magistrate, to disperse and put an end to all meetings likely to be productive of consequences such as were already mentioned. He by no means meant this power of dispersion to extend to meetings professedly and obviously lawful, and held for legal and constitutional purposes; but that, in every case of a numerous meeting, of whatever nature, or under whatever colour, notice should be given, so as to enable the magistrate to keep a watchful eye over their proceedings. He should therefore propose, that whatever be the pretext of a public meeting (if the house was at all of opinion there was any necessity for the regulation of such meetings), such notice should be given to the magistrate, in order that he might attend, for the preservation of the public peace; that he might watch the proceedings, to prevent any measure that might tend to attack, or to bring into contempt, either the sovereign himself

or any branch of the established government of the country. That the magistrate should be empowered to apprehend any persons whose conduct should seem calculated for those purposes, and that any resistance to the authority of a magistrate so acting, should be deemed felony in every person concerned in it. That, on perceiving the proceedings of such meeting to be tumultuous, and leading to the bad consequences he had already mentioned, the magistrate should have power similar to that which he had already by the riot act, to disperse that assembly; and that, after reading the riot act, and ordering them to disperse, any number of persons remaining should, as by the riot act, incur the penalty of the law, that of felony. The house would see, that this summary power in the magistrate, while it would still leave to the people the fair right to petition, on the one hand, would, on the other, prevent the abuse of it. This, he said, was the outline. All detail he would reserve for future discussion.

Under the other description of meetings, through which the minds of the people were poisoned, fell those of public lecturers, who made the dissemination of sedition the source of livelihood. To them he thought it would be proper to apply regulations something like those that passed about fourteen years ago, in an act, which, from the learned gentleman who brought it in, was called *Mansfield*'s act, and by which all houses wherein meetings of an improper kind were held on a Sunday, were to be treated as *disorderly houses*. And, to avoid evasion, the clause should apply to every house wherein any people met, exceeding a certain number to be stated in the act, the real family of the house. These, said he, are the outlines of the measure I have to propose; and so convinced am I that there can be but one feeling, and one opinion, that some measure of this kind is necessary [here a cry of "hear!" from the opposite side]; and so little am I shaken in that conviction by the adverse vociferations of "hear! hear!" that I am sure I should but shew a distrust of the cause, if I said any more. I will therefore only move,

27007

"That leave be given to bring in a bill for the more effectually preventing of seditious meetings and assemblies."

After a debate of much warmth, in which the measure was loudly reprobated by Mr. Fox, Mr. Sheridan, and Mr. Grey, the house divided on the motion for leave to bring in the bill,

Ayes 214
Noes 42

November 17, 1795.

On the question for the second reading of the bill for more effectually preventing seditious meetings and assemblies,

Mr. Pitt said, that as he had repeatedly delivered his sentiments upon the bill, he felt but little inclined unnecessarily to take up the attention of the house, particularly as most part of what had been already said that day had little connexion with the question. Under this description he did not include the comparison which the right honourable gentleman* had thought proper to draw between a revolution in this country in favour of the house of Stuart, and a revolution in favour of that kind of government which French principles would recommend and inculcate. No man could be more sensible than he was of the dreadful calamities that the nation would sustain by the re-establishment of a Popish pretender, who would, no doubt, endeavour to subvert our liberties, our religion, and our laws, and possibly he might succeed in his object. He had no hesitation, however, in declaring, that were he to chuse between two such horrible alternatives, he would cheerfully prefer the restoration of the pretender to that cruel and desolating system of anarchy, which would radically destroy all those principles by which social order was maintained. He scrupled not to agree with the right honourable gentleman in declaring, that were we under the same circumstances that pressed on our ancestors, we should be equally

* Mr. Fox.

ready to make the same sacrifices that they had done in so necessary a resistance; and he further admitted, that when we expressed ourselves equally willing to risk our lives in an opposition to either jacobitical or jacobinical principles, we had no more to offer, nor were we any longer to seek for any practical difference. It happened conveniently for his purpose, that the arguments and illustrations employed by the right honourable gentleman furnished him with materials which would serve for an answer to most of his arguments, as far as he had urged any thing closely connected with the subject. Of this comparison between the two kinds of revolutions alluded to in particular, without attempting to reason on which side the choice ought to preponderate, it was sufficient to say, that we were ready with our lives to resist the introduction of either.

Here, then, Mr. Pitt said, he wished to pause, and beseech the right honourable gentleman to adopt the sage counsels of his ancestors, with the same ardour which he expressed when he declared his desire to imitate the valour of their arms. Our ancestors expelled the family of the Stuarts, and established the glorious and immortal revolution, in the first instance by the sword; but their bravery might have been ineffectual, if they had not secured their object by legislative provisions. It was in this manner, more than by personal valour, that they preserved the constitution. What was the bill of rights itself, but a measure adopted by our ancestors in consequence of their finding themselves under new circumstances? They declared it to be high treason to dispute the queen's authority, to deny that the parliament was competent to confine and limit the succession, and, finally, to render attempts to introduce a system, different from that which they had established by the laws, feloniously penal. Upon examining the present bill it would be found, that their example was rigidly adhered to, and preventive measures resorted to, on motives of policy and prudence, in order to guard against that extreme which would make it necessary for many to risk their lives in a contest, and be involved in all the miseries that attend a civil war. One great recommendation of this tempora-

ry measure was, that it strictly adhered to the examples of former times; and while it added to the general security, made no innovation on the constitution, nor, in the smallest degree, weakened the spirit of the laws. Our ancestors, in times of danger, and even during that interval which took place between the deposition and the restoration of the monarchy, adhered, as much as so peculiar a situation would admit, to ancient forms, and conducted the public business by means of both houses of parliament, if that assembly could properly be called a parliament, when it was actually deprived of one of its component parts.

Were there no precedents, no land-marks, to guide their proceedings on the present emergency? In days of difficulty and danger, which had threatened one branch of the legislature, and when doubts had arisen respecting the competency of parliament to legislate in one particular case—limiting the succession of the crown, our ancestors made a law suitable to the occasion. But at this time what was the enemy that we had to contend with, and what the danger to be repelled? Not an attack upon one branch of the legislature, not a doubt about the right to legislate in a particular case; the right to legislate at all was questioned, and the legality of monarchy itself in any shape was denied. Was that, he begged to ask, a proper time to sit still, and refrain from taking vigorous and effectual measures, merely because they might deviate in some degree from established practice? The parallel that had been attempted to be drawn between the measures of the executive government at this time, and those of the house of Stuart, in no degree applied. In the days of the Charles', the people were above all taught to look up to parliament for safety and protection: they might undoubtedly look elsewhere for assistance, but parliament was the centre in which all their hopes and dependence rested, and in which alone they were led to expect redress for their grievances: such had been the example of their ancestors at the revolution, and, as it was before their eyes, it ought to regulate their proceedings.

The right honourable gentleman had talked of risking his life in defence of the constitution; he was not asked now to risk his life, he was asked only to apply the laws to the present state of the country, in such a manner as to render the risking of lives, for the present at least, unnecessary; and he was asked to do this in time, before the evil which threatened us should have risen to such a height, as to bring on personal dangers. Gentlemen had made much objection to this bill, as debarring the subject of the right to petition, as secured to them by the bill of rights. But did the bill of rights imply, that any other than parliament was to be the channel through which evils in the government or constitution were to be redressed? The revolution itself tended also to prove the point he was contending for; since it was a memorable example, that even when the throne was vacant, and when the forms of the constitution necessarily failed, yet, even then, so strong was the impression on the minds of men, of the maxims which they had before learnt, that no new constitution was formed in consequence, but the old constitution was still considered as subsisting. The two remaining houses of parliament, and those two houses alone, were then resorted to, and not the sovereignty of the people, as the means through which the other branch of the legislature was to be supplied. It was not to that sovereignty of the people which is now talked of, that recourse was had. Thus, therefore, the revolution itself conspired to shew that it was to parliament, or to the people in parliament, and not to the people out of parliament, that the right of framing alterations in the constitution always devolved.

The next point to be considered had been insisted upon much in the house, and, as he understood, made very industrious use of out of it; viz. that the present bill was calculated to create a difference, and cause a separation, between the lower and the higher orders of the people. The effect of this bill he was ready to maintain would be diametrically the reverse. The system of dividing the orders of the community was that which formed the grand spring and power of jacobinism, which the present bill

was evidently calculated to oppose, to check, and to suppress. It was by exciting the envy and hatred of the poor against those in higher stations, by holding out to them the hope of exchanging their conditions, and by representing property as the easy prey of the indigent, the idle, and the licentious, that the profligate principles of jacobinism had succeeded in destroying all social order in France, and the same end had been aimed at, by the same means, in all other parts of Europe.

Under our happy constitution, he believed there was no man of rank or property, at this time, so negligent of his duty, and so unacquainted with his interest, as to draw a line of separation between himself and those that were below him, in rank, affluence, or degree. What nation in the world now existed, or had been known to exist, in which the great and the low were placed at so little distance, and so slightly separated? A continued and well-cemented connexion, which could not easily be dissolved, was so visible, that it was impossible to fix upon any link in the general chain where the union of the parts did not immediately appear. The middle class derived supply, vigour, and support, from that below it; diffused it through all around; communicated and received reciprocal aid from that which was above it; and an animating spring gave that activity and general circulation of benefits to the whole, which composed the order of well-regulated society.

The manner by which the right honourable gentleman had attempted to prove that the tendency of this bill was to make such invidious distinctions, was most extraordinary. The bill had been held out, as a bill which proscribed all meetings whatsoever from petitioning parliament, except such as were licensed. So far from this, the bill left all established meetings precisely as they were before. The requiring of a license had been stated as, in all cases, an intolerable evil; it was, nevertheless, singular enough, that *not* to require a license was now considered by the right honourable gentleman as a still worse evil, on account of the partiality of the principle. He would ask, what was the partiality? Was it that all other meetings but those that were

licensed were to be abolished? No such thing: they were merely to be put under some new restrictions, which should make them more resemble the regular meetings, which were not to be subjected to a license.

But to come to the main question:—it was distinctly this. First, does the bill so abridge and limit the right of petitioning parliament, as to leave it insufficient for the purpose of affording due constitutional security? Secondly, does the bill impose any ineffectual, superfluous, and unnecessary restraints? In order to judge upon these questions, he would consider what were the limitations imposed by the bill on this right of petitioning. A previous notice of the intended meetings was, in certain cases, to be required. The meetings of corporate bodies were not required to give any notice whatever; meetings called by a certain number of justices: meetings called by the lords lieutenants of counties, or by sheriffs, were all excepted from the obligation. It had been said, however, that these last were servants of the crown, and because servants, therefore in the interest of the crown. But how did this observation apply? A sheriff of a county was under no influence either of dependence, or expectation, or gratitude. The office of sheriff was considered as an onerous and expensive office, which few persons liked, and from which many wished to be excused. Was it fair then to describe a meeting called by a sheriff, as a meeting called by one who was a mere tool of the crown? But, besides, what was the fact?—The fact was, that meetings were, according to the present custom, called by these very sheriffs, and a great proportion of the complaints of the country actually found their way to parliament through this channel;—a way which was still left open. This, he said, was the best proof that meetings of this sort were not unavailing. He believed it had commonly happened, that much the greater proportion of petitions to parliament came through the sheriffs, and those of another kind were usually thought more suspicious. How unfair then was it to call the bill, as it had been called, "an extinction of the right to petition," when, in fact, that channel through which petitions usually come, was still

left open! He declared he was as ready as any man to admit broadly, that *supposed or real grievances might, as matter of right, be presented to parliament by all ranks of people.* He must, however, at the same time remark, that he did not consider those to be the best friends of the constitution, or of the lower ranks of the people, who were always goading them to bring forward petitions, and encouraging the agitation and discussion of public affairs; among those, too, who, of all men, from their education, their habits of life, and their means of information, were indisputably the least capable of exercising sound judgment on such topics. The right of petitioning then remained as formerly, excepting in certain cases, to which he had alluded.

With regard to the observations made by the right honourable gentleman in his interference for procuring a more equal representation of the people in parliament, Mr. Pitt said, he would do him the justice to say that he never had encouraged the wild, visionary, and mischievous plan of universal suffrage and annual parliaments. He had felt, what every man of sense and observation must feel, that the house of commons, composed as it was, was the virtual representation of the people of England: the sole matter in doubt was, whether the members had such an identity of interest with those who had no voice in election of representatives, as would secure to the latter the consideration, to which, as Englishmen, they ought to be entitled? In the meetings held upon that subject formerly, though some of them had not been regularly convened by the sheriffs, he well remembered that their proceedings were looked to with more jealousy than the proceedings of those meetings which were assembled in a regular manner.

So little had been urged in opposition to the provisions of the bill, that it was unnecessary for him to argue much in their defence. The notice to be given of meetings held avowedly for the discussion of public measures, had been so modified as to retain little of that formidable appearance which gentlemen at first represented it to bear; indeed, the honourable gentleman himself had confessed, it was that part of the bill to which

he saw the least objection. So necessary did public advertisements, in order to convene large bodies of men on political questions, strike him to be, that the clause would seem a superfluous precaution, if it were not for the peculiar construction of the corresponding societies, which, by their divisions and subdivisions, had not only the means of secret communication, but also of prompt execution of their designs, however alarming, however dangerous.

It had been much insisted on, that a main objection to the bill was, that these meetings were hereafter to be held under the inspection of magistrates. The force of this objection would surely be done away, when it was considered that this provision only set all other meetings on the same footing with those which had always been authorised in their corporate capacities; for in regular meetings the sheriff was necessarily and of course always present. The next point complained of had been the mode of dispersing meetings. Was it possible for the house not to have felt the danger of some late meetings, and did they not feel the necessity of checking them? If they did not, he would only say, that this was not the time to trifle: if they did not seize the opportunity of applying a preventive, they might soon lose the power of exercising their own functions in that house. For this reason it was highly necessary to grant new discretionary power to magistrates—a degree of additional power, guarded by the degree of additional responsibility attached to them. He owned he felt some astonishment at one argument coming from a quarter from which he least expected it, a declaration thhat struck at the very foundation of the administration of public justice in this country. A learned gentleman* of the first professional talents, reputation, and practice, had urged as an argument against the bill, and put it in a general and unqualified manner, that the magistracy of the country were necessarily corrupt; an invective against a body of persons, to whose exertions, in their situation, the

* Mr. Erskine.

country owed the most signal services. With equal surprise he had heard the same learned and honourable gentleman who, while he arraigned the discretion granted to the magistrates under this bill, acknowledged at the same time, that they were already authorised to exercise the same powers under the existing laws, namely, the Riot Act, and a statute of Henry IV. which had been alluded to by the judge (the late Lord Mansfield) on the trial of Lord George Gordon. Without insisting, for the present, on the illiberality of the suggestion, its inconsistency was glaring, and it might be proper to consider, in another point of view, how a meeting convened by a sheriff could be esteemed a meeting held only by permission of his Majesty's ministers. That sheriffs were appointed by his Majesty, from lists made out by the judges of assize, of the persons most capable of serving that office, was certainly true. Although the office of sheriff was an office of dignity and honour, were he to ask, whether his Majesty, in conferring it, bestowed a favour which called for any great gratitude on the part of the receiver, he believed that in most instances he should be answered in the negative. Added to this, when the appointment was once conferred, the king had no power to remove the person appointed sheriff; and upon the whole, there was scarcely any office which was attended with a greater degree of independence. Other magistrates who exercised offices for which, as all our law-writers declared the nation was indebted to them, and who, in the service of their country, every day exposed themselves to insults and dangers, he could not but lament that any professional gentleman should be found to speak of them with such undeserved indignity. It well merited the close examination of gentlemen, to what extent, and to what extent only, the powers of magistrates under the present bill went to prevent meetings, if their designs seemed calculated to obtain redress through any other medium than the legislature, and to disperse them, if the magistrates were of opinion, that the proceedings held, or the speeches delivered at any meeting had an illegal tendency. In fine, the sole object of the bill was,

that the people should look to parliament, and to parliament alone, for the redress of such grievances as they might have to complain of, with a confident reliance of relief being afforded them, if their complaints should be well founded and practically remediable. That it should be understood that the condition of no man was so abject, but he could find a legal means of bringing his grievances before his representatives in parliament, and subject them to their consideration; but that he would not leave a door open, through which a torrent might rush in, and overwhelm the constitution. It behoved them to take care that menaces were not conveyed to parliament under the pretext of petitions, and that they were not made the vehicles of indirect libels, fabricated at meetings convened under the pretence of very different objects, by men whose real purpose it was to undermine and subvert the constitution.

Mr. Pitt concluded by saying, that, upon the whole, a just comparison ought to be made between the evils that might follow from this bill, and the dangers that might arise, were the house to reject it. The balance being struck on this alternative, the next question was, whether it was not necessary that the people should know it was to parliament alone that they must look for any alteration of the law, and that, when their grievances were known and stated, they would not look to parliament in vain for redress. The house and the public were equally interested in this bill, and so was every class of the people, as fair and constitutional petitioners; it therefore only remained for gentlemen to decide whether they did their duty best for the interests of their constituents or not, by entertaining or rejecting a bill founded on such principles.

The question was carried,

For the second reading of the bill 213
Against it 43

November 23, 1795.

Mr. Pitt having moved, that the order of the day, for going into a committee on the bill for the better security of his Majesty's person and government against treasonable and seditious practices, should be postponed till Wednesday,

Mr. Fox took this occasion to express in very forcible language his reprobation of the bills then passing through parliament, [the bill for more effectually preventing seditious meetings was at this time in its progress through the House] asserting that he conceived them to be a repeal of the bill of rights, and as tending to the subversion of the constitution. "If," said he, "I am asked how they are to be resisted, in the present instance, I will say by peaceable means, by petition, by remonstrance; but if they have once passed into law, and I am then asked how they are to be resisted, I will then answer, that it is no longer a question of morality and duty, but of prudence. I affirm, that no attack which the unfortunate family of Stuart made upon the liberties of the country was more alarming and atrocious than that which is intended by the present bills. I know that by this declaration of sentiment, I shall subject myself to misconstructions, but I am prepared to brave them in the discharge of my duty. I again repeat, that if the people of England submit to these bills, I may still retain my partiality for my countrymen: I shall wish them all happiness, consistent with such an abject state of mind—but I can no longer be a profitable servant to the public." Mr. Fox concluded by moving, that the committee on the bills should be postponed till that day se'nnight.

Mr. Pitt:—I do not rise, Sir, to argue the tendency of these bills. I do not rise to speak to the question of delay; that has already been fully discussed. Nor do I rise to follow the right honourable gentleman * through the whole of his speech. But there are some passages in it which, consistently with my duty as a member of parliament, with my feelings as a man, with my attachment to my sovereign, and my veneration for the constitution, I cannot hear, without instantly expressing my horror and indignation at them. The right honourable gentleman has made a bold, broad, and unqualified declaration, that if his ar-

* Mr. Fox.

guments and his measures do not prevent the passing of the bills, which a great majority of this house conceive to be necessary for the security of the person of the sovereign, and the preservation of the rights of the people, he will then have recourse to different means of opposition. He has avowed his intention of setting up his own arguments in opposition to the authority of the legislature. He has said, that if he is asked his advice, he will put the propriety of resistance only on the question of prudence;—without adverting whether the consequences of this advice may be followed by the penalties of treason, and the danger of convulsion, thus openly advising an appeal to the sword, which must either consign its authors to the vengeance of the violated law, or involve the country in anarchy and bloodshed. The right honourable gentleman has taken care not to be misstated: happily for the country, this declaration of his principles is too clear to admit of a doubt. With all the horror that I feel at such language, I am glad however the right honourable gentleman has been so unreserved and explicit. The house and the country will judge of that gentleman's conduct from his own language; they will see the extent of his veneration for the constitution, and of his respect for parliament, when, in violation of his duty, in defiance of legal punishment, he can bring himself to utter such sentiments. I am glad the right honourable gentleman has made that avowal, because I hope that it will warn all the true friends of the constitution to rally round it for its defence.

I will not enter into a discussion of the abstract right of resistance, or what degree of oppression on the part of the government, would set the people free from their allegiance. I will only call to the recollection of those who hear me, that the principle of these bills, upon which the right honourable gentleman has ventured such language, has met with the approbation of a large majority of the house, and I trust that majority have not forgot what is due to themselves and their country. I hope they will shew the right honourable gentleman, that they have not lost the spirit of their ancestors, which has been so fre-

quently referred to; and that if they are driven by treason to the hard necessity of defending the constitution by force, that they will act with that irresistible energy which such a crime must necessarily excite in a loyal assembly. The power of the law of England, I trust, will be sufficient to defeat the machinations of all who risk such dangerous doctrines, and to punish treason wherever it may be found. Let me tell the right honourable gentleman, therefore, that if our sense of public duty induces us to have recourse to those measures, we will not suffer ourselves to be intimidated by his menaces. If we feel it incumbent upon us to enact laws suited to the emergency of the times, we shall not be wanting to ourselves in the energy which may be required to enforce those laws; and whatever attempts may be made to resist their operation, we trust, that the power of the laws themselves will be found amply sufficient to defeat such attempts.

Mr. Fox rose to explain:—"I rise to re-state my expression, but not to retract one word of what I have said. Let the words be taken down at the table.—They express the sentiments of an honest Englishman; they are those sentiments for which our forefathers shed their blood, and upon which the revolution was founded: but let me not be mistaken. The case I put was, that these bills might be passed by a corrupt majority of parliament, contrary to the opinion and sentiments of the great body of the nation. If the majority of the people approve of these bills, I will not be the person to inflame their minds, and stir them up to rebellion; but if, in the general opinion of the country, it is conceived, that these bills attack the fundamental principles of our constitution, I then maintain, that the propriety of resistance, instead of remaining any longer a question of morality, will become merely a question of prudence. I may be told that these are strong words; but strong measures require strong words. I will not submit to arbitrary power, while there remains any alternative to vindicate my freedom."

The House negatived Mr. Fox's amendment without a division.

December 10, 1795.

The order of the day being moved, for the third reading of the bill for the better security of his Majesty's person and government against treasonable and seditious practices,

Mr. PITT rose as soon as Mr. Fox had spoken:

After the many important discussions, which for some days past have successively engaged your attention, it would ill become me to occupy much of your time at this advanced period of the debate; but having had so large a share in bringing forward these bills, it is necessary that I should shortly advert to the arguments advanced against them by gentlemen on the other side. And first, I will take notice of the general objections, before I enter into the detail of the measures.

There is one circumstance, in which I agree with the right honourable gentleman who has just sat down, that these bills form an important crisis in the history of this country. The crisis is not less important than whether the king, lords, and commons, invested with the constitutional power of the country, and acting for the protection of the whole, shall unite to repel the attacks of those, who have proclaimed themselves the enemies of the constitution, and who now, under the pretence of exercising its privileges, are busied in carrying on the hostile designs which formerly they openly avowed, and which they have never since abandoned. There are two reasons from which I am apt to think that this crisis is determined. On this day a boldness of language and vehemence of assertion have been employed in arraigning the bills, which go beyond the bounds of parliamentary usage, and almost beyond the expressions of the English language. One gentleman*, in a speech apparently studied, with a great deal of prepared and elaborate attack, has called these, *infernal bills*, and has used terms which, if meant to cha-

* Mr. Jekyll.

racterise those bills, were too hyperbolical for the effusions of practical exaggeration. Another honourable gentleman*, who has always been the champion exclusively of the democratic part of the British constitution, has said, that if he was by rank entitled to demand an audience, he would beseech the king to exert that power vested in him by the constitution, of putting his negative on these bills. What! does the honourable gentleman think it would be decorous in a grave hereditary counsellor of the crown, to go to his Majesty with his advice to reject these bills, which are to be offered to him by the other two branches of the legislature, as a testimony of their concern for the safety of his royal person, and which comprehend a salutary enactment, in support of their own constitutional rights? That honourable gentleman has gone so far as to say, that such a counsellor would receive immortal honour by such advice. The right honourable gentleman who spoke last†, would advise his Majesty not to put his negative on the bills, but immediately to dissolve his parliament, which he said was his constitutional right. It certainly is part of the power and prerogative of the crown, to dissolve the parliament: but there has been a time when that right honourable gentleman was not quite so well convinced that such dissolution was an unquestionable exercise of a just prerogative; on the contrary, when the loud voice of the people was heard from all quarters, about twelve years ago, against a particular public measure, that honourable gentleman not only questioned the constitutional right to dissolve in such circumstances, but branded the dissolution which took place, as perfectly unconstitutional. If his Majesty should have advisers that would give such counsel, I shall only say, that they will not be those who are in the habit of giving his Majesty advice, and are responsible for the advice they give.

A strong proof to me that the crisis to which I have referred is determined, is the different language which I now find to be held by the right honourable gentleman†. He has no longer

* Mr. Sheridan. † Mr. Fox.

any hopes to prevent the bills from being enacted, but he trusts to the people in order to have them speedily repealed. I am glad to find that the right honourable gentleman is become so far a convert to the system of moderation, that he looks to see how many he can bring to concur with him in endeavouring to procure the repeal of the bills, if they should pass into laws, and not with how many he may thing it prudent to resist their operation. I am glad to find that this doctrine of resistance, on which so much stress was laid in an earlier stage of the business, is not at this time uppermost in the mind of the right honourable gentleman. I trust that the avowal and justification of this doctrine will not sink deeper in the minds of any part of the community, and produce that impression which such a principle is calculated to make on violent and unenlightened minds. Should their ignorance be misled and their passions inflamed, dreadful indeed may be the consequences on their future conduct. I trust that the danger incurred to the public peace, will operate as a warning to prevent gentlemen from rashly and hastily broaching doctrines in the heat of debate, which may produce the most pernicious effects on the minds of others, long after their better judgment and more mature deliberation have eradicated them from their own.

Having noticed these general topics, I proceed now more particularly to consider the nature of the present bill. The subject resolves itself into two points. I shall first advert to that part of the bill, which affects the existing law of treason; and secondly, to the particular species of misdemeanour to which the bill is calculated to apply. First, the bill makes a conspiracy to do any thing that may tend to the king's death, to maim or to do him any species of bodily injury, to restrain and imprison his person, or to seek to make him alter, by force, the measures of his government, a substantive treason. These by the statute of the 25th of Edward III. are only made overt acts, of compassing and imagining the king's death. By the present bill they are made direct and substantive treasons. By the other part of the bill it is made treason to levy war,

to overawe the legislature. The right honourable gentleman has asked, might not the people attempt to influence the decision of the legislature by the force of opinion, by the violence of prayer? He forgets that the bill does not preclude the people from any peaceable and legal mode of bringing forward their opinion, in order to influence the sentiments of the legislature; that it does not interfere with their right, or prevent them from carrying to their representatives, in decent and orderly language, their sense of public measures. The treason described by the bill attaches only to those who levy war in order to overawe the legislature. Will the honourable gentleman contend, that levying war has any connexion with that mode of expressing opinion, which is intended to influence the proceedings of a legislative body? The right honourable gentleman objects to the preamble, which, by the by, he seems not to have read.—[Mr. Fox expressed some indignation at this charge.] I do not mean, that the right honourable gentleman ought to have read the preamble as part of his speech; but undoubtedly he seems not to have attended to the latter part of that preamble. He said, that he liked no preamble, which did not state truth. He affirmed, that the preamble made the attack on his Majesty the foundation of the bill, and contended, that though the bill purported to be for the security of his Majesty's person, and the preservation of his government, it did not, in fact, tend to give to either any additional security. If the right honourable gentleman had gone farther, and read the latter part of the preamble, he would have found, that it was not so narrowed and confined as he has described; that it stated not only the attack on his Majesty, as the ground of the bill, but also the seditious speeches and publications of evil-disposed persons.

In opposition to the right honourable gentleman, I maintain, that the provisions of the bill are calculated to give greater security to his Majesty's person and government, and that the grounds stated in the preamble, are commensurate to all the objects which the bill has in view. In all times, when the person of

the sovereign has been supposed to be endangered, a law of this nature has been passed. We are not now, for the first time, bringing forward a speculative act, of the probable consequences of which we cannot pretend to judge, but we are copying the wisdom of our ancestors—we are adopting the salutary precautions of former times. Acts, of which this is a transcript, were passed in the reigns of Queen Elizabeth, and of Charles the Second. Elizabeth has been reproached as an arbitrary princess. It is certain that her life was threatened from many quarters. But how far is the charge that this act is a weak and inefficient measure, consistent with the description which has been given of her character? If she was an arbitrary princess, it surely is not likely, that where her own preservation was concerned, she should adopt measures inadequate to the purpose. The parliament of Charles the Second has been accused with making many sacrifices to the throne. It is not, therefore, probable, that in the excess of their loyalty, and the superabundance of their zeal, they should have neglected to put a sufficient guard around the king's person. Thus does the reasoning of those gentlemen, so far at least as concerns the efficacy of the measure, retort upon themselves. Such laws having passed in different periods of our history, and having in no instance been found insufficient, we have a strong and well-grounded presumption that they are well calculated to afford security to the person of the sovereign. They apply directly the penalties of treason to that species of offence against the person of the sovereign, to which, before, they could only have circuitously been brought to attach. They constitute substantive treasons, acts which before could only have been brought to prove the criminal intention. But an instance yet fresh in our memories, and which made too deep an impression on the house to be easily forgotten, will best illustrate the proposition. Supposing the person who threw the stone at his Majesty, on his way to parliament, to have been discovered and brought to trial, he would not have wanted an able and eloquent advocate to have pleaded, "that by throwing the stone

he had no intention of seriously injuring the person of the sovereign; that he was actuated by no deliberate, malicious purpose; that he was carried away by the impulse of the moment; that he meant, by throwing the stone, only to mark more strongly that sentiment of indignity to his Majesty, which excited the clamours of disapprobation among the surrounding multitude, and to express his own feelings of resentment from the continuance of the war." It is possible (I do not say that it would be justified by the sound construction of the law) even that such a defence, dressed up with ingenuity, and enforced with the eloquence with which it would not fail to be supported might induce an honest jury to pronounce a verdict of acquittal. The intention of this bill is to cut off the possibility of such a defence being made in extenuation of such an act, to remove from the offender all hopes of escape by subterfuge and evasion, and by making the remedy more simple, to diminish the danger.

But it was said, why not make a new declaratory law? It was necessary that the present should be an enacting and not a declaratory law, because it only made that which was already treason by the statute of the 25th of Edward III. treason under another branch, and to be laid in a different manner in the indictment. As to the present bill making new treasons, which were not before known to the law of England, in contradiction to so injurious an assertion let me refer to the most grave and respectable authorities, to the writings of Lord Hale, and Sir Matthew Foster. These learned and venerable judges have given a history of the different statutes of treason, accompanied with their own comments. The object of the present bill is clearly to define the true meaning of the old law, which is now only to be drawn out of a long series of judicial expositions. It is in order to guard against all ambiguous and doubtful interpretation, at a time when it may be necessary to provide against a positive and immediate danger. Must not such be felt to be the case, when a daring attack has so recently been made on the person of his Majesty, and when the instance of

the precise danger against which the bill is directed, has happened under our own eyes, and at the door of parliament? The bill also makes an attempt to overawe the legislature, high treason. Is it necessary by any long deduction of argument to prove the necessity of such a precaution at a moment, when there exist societies hostile to the authority and existence of parliament? Those societies, meeting under the specious pretext of parliamentary reform, and the right of petitioning, have employed a language which sufficiently shews how far these were their real objects. They declared that the five-hundred and fifty-eight gentlemen of St. Stephen's chapel may go about their business. They took every opportunity to vilify the character of the legislative body, to express their contempts of its authority and to shew how much they were disposed to usurp its functions, and if possible, to annihilate its existence.

The right honourable gentleman has dealt much in general topics of declamation. He said that he had never found that the lives of princes had been safe in proportion to the sanguinary laws and the severe punishments which had been instituted for their protection. I must remark, that the present is no new sanguinary law, that it creates no extraordinary severity of punishment. If the right honourable gentleman thinks that the person of the sovereign is not rendered safer by the punishments which the law has devised for his protection, this argument goes to repeal all the existing laws of treason. But he chooses to appeal to the testimony of experience, and to the example of former periods of the history of this country. He asks whether, notwithstanding the excessive loyalty of the parliament, and the extreme vigour of the laws, there were not some real plots in the reign of Charles the Second, besides the sham plots that were brought forward to serve a particular purpose? That in the course of that reign the parliament made many shameful concessions, I am ready to admit; but I can by no means allow that it was a blind indiscriminating spirit of devotion to the monarch which gave rise to the act, of which this bill is the counterpart. Neither can I allow that these persons

who were concerned in effecting the restoration, left principles altogether out of their view, though, perhaps, they neglected to employ some precautions which it would have been wise and proper to have adopted. In order to prove that some regard was had to principles in the act of the restoration, it is only necessary to refer to the history of the times, and to the persons concerned in that event. Hyde, Earl of Clarendon, and those who were connected with him, were not men entirely indifferent about the English constitution, or likely to be parties in a transaction, where its principles were entirely left out of contemplation. But with respect to this particular act, we have the sanction of the venerable name of Serjeant Maynard, who was one of the persons then employed in framing the bill for the security of his Majesty's person. Immediately after the restoration, this truly constitutional lawyer said, "That except for that event he had been on the eve not only of surviving lawyers, but the laws."—[Mr. Pitt was reminded that these words were spoken not after the restoration, but after the revolution]—I admit my error—these words were spoken after the revolution; and is it likely that the venerable person, who, during the course of a long and honourable life, had preserved his attachment to the constitution, should have so entirely forgotten its spirit, or departed from its principles in framing that bill, so frequently referred to in the discussion? But I will ask the right honourable gentleman, does he attribute the plots in the time of Charles the Second, to the adoption of new laws, and the unusual severity of punishments; or does he not rather attribute them to the repeated breaches of law committed by that monarch, and to the attempts which he made, at different periods of his reign, to govern without a parliament? Among his other allusions to history, the right honourable gentleman refers to the reign of Robespierre. He asks, whether that tyrant derived any security from the system of terror which he employed as the engine of his government, and which he supported by a large military force? I appeal to the house, how far this allusion can, with any propriety, apply to the pre-

sent discussion? I appeal to the house, how far the question—whether a lawless, wanton, and barbarous system of proscription and carnage, is calculated to afford security to the tyranny from which it originates?—can possibly bear a comparison with the effect of those regulations, which we are now employed in enacting for the security of his Majesty's person, who is the object of the affections of his people, and for the preservation of that government, which is the best pledge for their happiness?

I shall now very shortly advert to the second part of the bill, which relates to misdemeanours. The first question is, whether, in any possible case of misdemeanour, transportation is a punishment which ought to be left to the discretion of the court? Misdemeanours are undoubtedly of very different sorts, and unless they can be marked out and graduated by some scale of legislative regulation, it is necessary, that, in adjusting the punishment, something should be left to discretion. The misdemeanours against which the present bill is directed, are of the most serious description. They are those offences which are productive of the worst consequences, which militate against the welfare of the whole community, which are calculated to disturb the order, and interrupt the tranquillity of society. If we look to the ordinary operation of law, and compare the species of misdemeanours described in this bill, with other offences which are at present punishable with transportation, I appeal to the house whether those offences, either in point of moral guilt, or of public danger, are to be compared to the acts against which this bill is calculated to guard. The right honourable gentleman has descanted on the hardship of the sentence of transportation, and talked of the compassion due to individuals, who, from having been placed in a better situation of life, had been doomed to experience its rigours. That it is a sentence at all times severe in its operation I cannot but admit; and that it becomes more peculiarly so when the person who is its object, has been placed in a respectable and comfortable situation. That such a person should be compelled

to abandon the society to which he had been accustomed, for companions of a very different description; that he should be doomed to relinquish his native land, and the comforts of his situation, and condemned to associate with the rudest and vilest of mankind, is a consideration which must naturally impress every mind with compassion. But while we feel compassion for ths individual, we must recollect, that, as legislators, there is a duty which we owe to the public paramount to every other consideration. We must recollect, that if the punishment rises in proportion to the situation which the individual held in society, and that if our pity is more strongly excited from the consideration of these advantages he has forfeited, so also is the enormity of the crime aggravated by the same consideration; and he who, being placed in a respectable and comfortable situation, subjects himself to the penalties of law, wanting the temptation to err, wants also the apology for offence. If the ignorant and unenlightened individual, the blind and deluded instrument, is doomed to punishment for the crime which, from the instruction or the example of others, he has learned to regard as a virtue, with what sentiments must we look to the master-workman, who perverts the advantages of education, abuses the talents of nature, and employs the very distinctions which he derives from the present order of society, as means of attack against the existence of society itself? I have only to call upon the house, to consider what is the description of offence against which the punishment is directed. It is not to apply twice to the offence that may have previously been committed, but to the second instance of offence after conviction. An objection was started, that the species of crimes comprehended under the present bill, was of a description, of the nature of which it was not within the province of a jury to judge. My honourable friend (the attorney-general) has stated to the house what is his own practice. He has always left to the jury to decide, whether the innocent cause assigned was the real motive of the action: but in stating this, he stated not only that mode of practice which is conform-

able to the liberality of his own sentiments, but which is sanctioned by the liberal spirit of the laws of England. There is no legal privilege which may not be made the pretext to cover the most illegal actions. I must particularly remark, in order to obviate misrepresentation, that nothing is made a crime by the present bill which was not before criminal, and subjected to a severe punishment by the common law of England.

After what I have already said, I have nothing farther to add, as I conceive the present bill to be supported on the plainest and simplest grounds on which any legislative provision was ever offered to the house.

The bill was afterwards read a third time and passed.

February 12, 1796.

Mr. Whitbread having moved the second reading of the labourers' wages bill, and the motion being seconded by Mr. Honeywood,

Mr. Pitt said, that not observing that gentlemen were prepared to deliver their sentiments on the present bill, he could not give a silent vote upon a question of so much importance, and at the same time of so much delicacy. In the interval which had taken place since the first reading of the bill, he had paid considerable attention to the subject, and endeavoured to collect information from the best sources to which he had access. The evil was certainly of such a nature as to render it of importance to find out a proper remedy; but the nature of the remedy involved discussions of such a delicate and intricate nature, that none should be adopted without being maturely weighed. The present situation of the labouring poor in this country, was certainly not such as could be wished, upon any principle, either of humanity, or policy. That class had of late been exposed to hardships which they all concurred in lamenting, and were equally actuated by a desire to remove. He

would not argue how far the comparison of the state of the labourer, relieved as it had been by a display of beneficence never surpassed at any period, with the state of this class of the community in former times, was just, though he was convinced that the representations were exaggerated. At any rate, the comparisons were not accurate, because they did not embrace a comprehensive view of the relative situations. He gave the honourable gentleman * ample credit for his good intentions in bringing the present bill into parliament, though he was afraid that its provisions were such as it would be impolitic, upon the whole, to adopt; and though they were adopted, he believed that they would be found to be inadequate to the purposes which they proposed.

The authority of a very eminent calculator, Dr. Price, had been adduced to shew the great advance that had taken place on every article of subsistence, compared with the slow increase of the wages of labour. But the statement of Dr. Price was erroneous, as he compared the earnings of the labourer at the period when the comparison is instituted, with the price of provisions, and the earnings of the labourer at the present day, with the price of the same articles, without adverting to the change of circumstances, and to the difference of provisions. Corn, which was then almost the only food of the labourer, was now supplied by cheaper substitutions, and it was unfair to conclude that the wages of labour were so far from keeping pace with the price of provisions, because they could no longer purchase the same quantity of an article, for which the labourer had no longer the same demand. The simple question now to be considered was, whether the remedy for the evil, which was admitted in a certain extent to exist, was to be obtained by giving to the justices the power to regulate the price of labour, and by endeavouring to establish by authority, what would be much better accomplished by the unassisted operation of principles?

It was unnecessary to argue the general expediency of any

* Mr. Whitbread.

legislative interference, as the principles had been perfectly recognized by the honourable gentleman himself. The most celebrated writers upon political economy, and the experience of those states where arts had flourished the most, bore ample testimony of their truth. They had only to inquire, therefore, whether the present case was strong enough for the exception, and whether the means proposed were suited to the object intended? The honourable gentleman imagined that he had on his side of the question the support of experience in this country, and appealed to certain laws upon the statute book, in confirmation of his proposition. He did not find himself called upon to defend the principle of these statutes, but they were certainly introduced for purposes widely different from the object of the present bill. They were enacted to guard the industry of the country from being checked by a general combination among labourers; and the bill now under consideration, was introduced solely for the purpose of remedying the inconveniences which labourers sustain from the disproportion existing between the price of labour, and the price of living.

He had the satisfaction to hear the honourable gentleman acknowledge, that if the price of labour could be made to find its own level, it would be much more desirable than to assess it by arbitrary statute, which in the execution was liable to abuse on the one hand, and inefficacy on the other. If the remedy succeeded according to the most sanguine expectations, it only established what would have been better effected by principle; and if it failed, on the one hand it might produce the severest oppression, and on the other encourage the most profligate idleness and extravagance. Was it not better for the house then to consider the operation of general principles, and rely upon the effects of their unconfined exercise? Was it not wiser to reflect what remedy might be adopted, at once more general in its principles, and more comprehensive in its object, less exceptionable in its example, and less dangerous in its application? They should look to the instances where interference had shackled industry, and where the best intentions have often produced

the most pernicious effects. It was indeed the most absurd bigotry in asserting the general principle, to exclude the exception; but trade, industry, and barter would always find their own level, and be impeded by regulations which violated their natural operation, and deranged their proper effect. This being granted, then, he appealed to the judgment of the house, whether it was better to refer the matter entirely to the discretion of a magistrate, or to endeavour to find out the causes of the evil, and by removing the causes, to apply a remedy more justifiable in its principle, more easy in the execution, more effectual in its operations, in fine, more consonant to every maxim of sound and rational policy. The evil, in his opinion, originated, in a great measure, in the abuses which had crept into the poor-laws of this country, and the complicated mode of executing them. The poor-laws of this country, however wise in their original institution, had contributed to fetter the circulation of labour, and to substitute a system of abuses, in room of the evils which they humanely meant to redress, and by engrafting upon a defective plan, defective remedies produced nothing but confusion and disorder. The laws of settlements prevented the workman from going to that market where he could dispose of his industry to the greatest advantage, and the capitalist, from employing the person who was qualified to procure him the best returns for his advances. These laws had at once increased the burdens of the poor, and taken from the collective resources of the state, to supply wants which their operation had occasioned, and to alleviate a poverty which they tended to perpetuate. Such were the institutions which misguided benevolence had introduced, and, with such warnings to deter, it would be wise to distrust a similar mode of conduct, and to endeavour to discover remedies of a different nature. The country had not yet experienced the full benefit of the laws that had already been passed, to correct the errors which he had explained.

From the attention he had bestowed upon the subject, and from the inquiries he had been able to make of others, he was

disposed to think we had not gone yet far enough, and to entertain an opinion that many advantages might be derived, and much of the evil now complained of removed, by an extension of those reformations in the poor-laws which had been begun. The encouragement of friendly societies would contribute to alleviate that immense charge with which the public was loaded in the support of the poor, and provide by savings of industry for the comfort of distress. Now the parish officer could not remove the workman, merely because he apprehended he might be burdensome, but it was necessary that he should be actually chargeable. But from the pressure of a temporary distress, might the industrious mechanic be transported from the place where his exertions could be useful to himself and his family, to a quarter where he would become a burden without the capacity of being even able to provide for himself. To remedy such a great striking grievance, the laws of settlement ought to undergo a radical amendment. He conceived, that to promote the free circulation of labour, to remove the obstacles by which industry is prohibited from availing itself of its resources, would go far to remedy the evils, and diminish the necessity of applying for relief to the poor's rates. In the course of a few years, this freedom, from the vexatious restraint which the laws imposed, would supersede the object of their institutions. The advantages would be widely diffused, the wealth of the nation would be increased, the poor man rendered not only more comfortable but more virtuous, and the weight of poor's rates, with which the landed interest is loaded, greatly diminished. He should wish, therefore, that an opportunity were given of restoring the original purity of the poor laws, and of removing those corruptions by which they had been obscured. He was convinced, that the evils which they had occasioned did not arise out of their original constitution, but coincided with the opinion of Blackstone, that, in proportion as the wise regulations that were established in the long and glorious reign of Queen Elizabeth, have been superseded by subsequent enact-

ments, the utility of the institution has been impaired, and the benevolence of the plan rendered fruitless.

While he thus had expressed those sentiments which the discussion naturally prompted, it might not, perhaps, be improper, on such an occasion, to lay before the house the ideas floating in his mind, though not digested with sufficient accuracy, nor arranged with a proper degree of clearness. Neither what the honourable gentleman proposed, nor what he himself had suggested, were remedies adequate to the evil it was intended to remove. Supposing, however, the two modes of remedying the evil were on a par in effect, the preference in principle was clearly due to that which was least arbitrary in its nature: but it was not difficult to perceive that the remedy proposed by the honourable gentleman would either be completely ineffectual, or such as far to over-reach its mark. As there was a difference in the numbers which compose the families of the labouring poor, it must necessarily require more to support a small family. Now by the regulations proposed, either the man with a small family would have too much wages, or the man with a large family, who had done most service to his country, would have too little. So that were the minimum fixed upon the standard of a large family, it might operate as an encouragement to idleness on one part of the community; and if it were fixed on the standard of a small family, those would not enjoy the benefit of it for whose relief it was intended. What measure then could be found to supply the defect? Let us, said he, make relief in cases where there are a number of children, a matter of right and an honour, instead of a ground for opprobrium and contempt. This will make a large family a blessing, and not a curse; and this will draw a proper line of distinction between those who are able to provide for themselves by their labour, and those who, after having enriched their country with a number of children, have a claim upon its assistance for their support. All this, however, he would confess, was not enough, if they did not engraft upon it resolutions to discourage relief where it was not wanted. If such means could

be practised as that of supplying the necessities of those who required assistance by giving it in labour or affording employment, which is the principle of the act of Queen Elizabeth, the most important advantages would be gained. They would thus benefit those to whom they afforded relief, not only by the assistance bestowed, but by giving habits of industry and frugality, and in furnishing a temporary bounty, enable them to make permanent provision for themselves. By giving effect to the operation of friendly societies, individuals would be rescued from becoming a burthen upon the public, and, if necessary, be enabled to subsist upon a fund which their own industry contributed to raise. These great points of granting relief according to the number of children, preventing removals at the caprice of the parish officer, and making them subscribe to friendly societies, would tend in a very great degree to remove every complaint to which the present partial remedy could be applied. Experience had already shewn how much could be done by the industry of children, and the advantages of early employing them in such branches of manufactures as they are capable to execute. The extension of schools of industry was also an object of material importance. If any one would take the trouble to compute the amount of all the earnings of the children who are already educated in this manner, he would be surprised, when he came to consider the weight which their support by their own labours, took off the country, and the addition which, by the fruits of their toil, and the habits to which they were formed, was made to its internal opulence. The suggestion of these schools was originally drawn from Lord Hale and Mr. Locke, and upon such authority he had no difficulty in recommending the plan to the encouragement of the legislature. Much might be effected by a plan of this nature susceptible of constant improvement. Such a plan would convert the relief granted to the poor into an encouragement to industry, instead of being, as it is by the present poor-laws, a premium to idleness, and a school for sloth. There were also, a number of subordinate circum-

stances, to which it was necessary to attend. The law which prohibits giving relief where any visible property remains should be abolished. That degrading condition should be withdrawn. No temporary occasion should force a British subject to part with the last shilling of his little capital, and compel him to descend to a state of wretchedness from which he could never recover, merely that he might be entitled to a casual supply.

Another mode also of materially assisting the industrious poor was, the advancing of small capitals, which might be repaid in two or three years, while the person who repaid it would probably have made an addition to his income. This might put him who received them in the way of acquiring what might place him in a situation to make permanent provision for himself.

These were the general ideas which had occurred to him upon the subject; if they should be approved of by any gentleman in the house, they might perhaps appear at a future time in a more accurate shape than he could pretend to give them. He could not, however, let this opportunity slip without throwing them out. He was aware that they would require to be very maturely considered. He was aware also of a fundamental difficulty, that of insuring the diligent execution of any law that should be enacted. This could only be done by presenting to those who should be intrusted with the execution motives to emulation, and by a frequent inspection of their conduct as to diligence and fidelity. Were he to suggest an outline, it would be this. To provide some new mode of inspection by parishes, or by hundreds—to report to the magistrates at the petty sessions, with a liberty of appeal from them to the general quarter sessions, where the justice should be empowered to take cognizance of the conduct of the different commissioners, and to remedy whatever defects should be found to exist. That an annual report should be made to parliament, and that parliament should impose upon itself the duty of tracing the effect of its system from year to year, till it should be fully matured. That there should be a standing order of the house

for this purpose, and in a word, that there should be an annual budget opened, containing the details of the whole system of poor-laws, by which the legislature would shew, that they had a constant and a watchful eye upon the interests of the poorest and most neglected part of the community.

Mr. Pitt said he was not vain enough to imagine that these ideas were the result of his own investigations, but he was happy to say, that they arose from a careful examination of the subject, and an extensive survey of the opinions of others. He would only add, that it was a subject of the utmost importance, and that he would do every thing in his power to bring forward or promote such measures as would conduce to the interest of the country. He concluded with apologizing for having taken up so much of the time of the house: the fact was, the importance of the subject had led him into a further discussion, than it had been his intention to go into, and he was desirous of shewing the honourable gentleman that he had spared no pains to collect information upon it; and although he gave the honourable gentleman every possible credit for his humane and laudable motives, yet, seeing the subject in the light in which he did, he was compelled to give his negative to the motion.

Mr. Whitbread afterwards, waving his motion for the second reading of the bill, moved for leave to bring in a bill to repeal the statute of the 5th of Elizabeth; which was granted.

February 15, 1796.

On a motion by Mr. Grey, for an address to his Majesty, "that he would be graciously pleased to take such steps as to his royal wisdom should appear most proper, for communicating directly to the Executive Directory of the French Republic, his Majesty's readiness to meet any disposition to negociation on the part of that government, with an earnest desire to give it the fullest and speediest effect,"

Mr. Pitt spoke to the following purport:

Much as the honourable gentleman * has introduced into his speech, connected with the origin and conduct of the war, from which I must decidedly dissent; much as I differ with him on many of the topics he has urged, and on many of the principles he has laid down, as grounds for his motion; and firmly as I am persuaded that no measure could be more hostile to the true interests of this country, than the line of conduct which he has proposed to be adopted; there is still one view of the subject on which I believe it impossible there can be any difference of opinion. If the state of the country, and the sentiments of a great majority of this house, are such as I have reason to suppose, there cannot, indeed, be any wide or essential difference as to the general result. But if, after the explanation which I may be able to give with respect to the state of this country, and the position of the enemy, the honourable gentleman shall still chuse to persevere in his motion, there are one or two consequences, which might otherwise be drawn from any declaration of mine on the present occasion, against which it may be necessary for me to guard. I must, therefore, guard against any imputations which may hereafter be brought forward, either as to the insincerity of any declaration which I may express in favour of peace, or as to the inefficiency of the measures taken to facilitate its progress. However I may be disposed to favour that object, which the motion seems principally to have in view, I can by no means concede the grounds on which it has been followed up;—I mean that from a view of our situation, and of the events of the war, we should discover such shameful humiliation, such hopeless despondency, as to abandon every thing for which we have formerly contended, and be disposed to prostrate ourselves at the feet of the enemy. If the necessity of our condition, if the sense of having been baffled, should operate so strongly as to induce us to make overtures of peace upon any terms; if every consideration of policy, and every feeling of decent and honourable pride, must be sacrificed to the extreme pressure of

* Mr. Grey.

our affairs; we must then, indeed, be bound to receive the law of the conqueror. This situation of affairs the honourable gentleman has not indeed developed, but has pretty plainly insinuated it as a ground for his motion. I trust, however, that the state of this country is far different, and that no temporary reverse in the fortune of war, no internal pressure in our domestic situation, has yet produced this mortifying humiliation, this dreadful alternative.

But the honourable gentleman, as an impeachment of the sincerity of ministers with respect to peace, has alluded to an argument, which was formerly supported from this side of the house —that we could not make peace without humbling ourselves to the enemy, and without discovering that we were baffled in our attempts and exhausted in our resources. From this he no doubt meant to insinuate that ministers were at no time sincere in their wishes for peace, and were disposed to throw every obstacle in its way. He does not think proper to mention, that this argument was made use of at a time when the opponents of the war, availing themselves of a series of misfortunes and disappointments which had befallen the confederacy, took the opportunity to press their motion for an immediate peace. We then contended, that the evil was not so great as to exclude hope, or to damp enterprize, that no circumstances had taken place under which a firm and manly resistance became impracticable, and that we might still look with confidence to the effect of a vigorous and persevering prosecution of the war. In proportion as this truth has become manifest to the enemy themselves, do we feel ourselves inclined to adopt a more conciliating tone. In proportion as the situation of things is inverted, the objection, which we formerly made, is superseded. That situation which the honourable gentleman chose only to suppose as theoretical, I contend to be practical; that our successes have been such as to obviate any obstacle to negociation on the score of national honour; and so far I undoubtedly am of opinion, that the difficulty is infinitely diminished.

In stating, however, generally, my own sentiments, and those

of his Majesty's ministers, I must protest against the practice of being called upon from day to day, from week to week, from time to time, to declare what are precisely our views on the posture of affairs, or what are the steps, which we may think it necessary in consequence to adopt. The progress of the measures, which such a situation of affairs as the present may render necessary, can only be left safely to the conduct of the executive government. If the house are of opinion that the business cannot be safely left in the hands of ministers, the proper step would be to address his Majesty to remove them from their situation; and not to endeavour to interrupt the affairs of government by calling on the house of commons to interfere with the functions of executive authority. The honourable gentleman himself seemed to be aware of this, as he admitted the principle to be correct; he said he did not contend against the constitutional degree of confidence which an executive government ought to have from the legislative power, while its conduct was unexceptionable.

The honourable gentleman says that he does not confide in ministers: on that ground he has been led to give an uniform opposition to their measures during the war: and on the same ground he now expresses his distrust of the sincerity of their wishes respecting peace. Unquestionably the honourable gentleman, who places no confidence in ministers, is entitled to oppose their measures and to question their sincerity; but he is bound to conform to established rules, and not to effect any change in a constitutional question. I mean, whenever this house, adopting a motion like the present, instead of addressing his Majesty to remove his ministers, apply in order to take the business into their own hands, they deprive the country of every chance for a successful negociation. On a question so critical, I am afraid lest I should overstep the line of my duty, by entering too much into detail. It is a subject on which it is impossible to descant so minutely as the honourable gentleman seems to expect, without breaking in upon that principle which has guided every discreet minister in treating subjects of this nature. If I felt

that generally, as applicable to subjects of this kind, how much more must I feel it on this particular occasion, considering, as I must, the peculiar situation of the country at this moment?

Let gentlemen look at the situation of affairs on the Continent; let them look at the situation of our enemy; what has been their plan and practice? what has been the case in this respect since the honourable gentleman reminded the house of the matter? What, I would ask, has been the effect of the separation of the general confederacy against France, and the weakening of the power of that confederacy?—power, that long ere this, might have achieved much advantage, had they kept in union. Recollect what has happened upon the appearance of that separation, and then conjecture what might have been the effect, had the confederacy remained entire. The destruction of the enemy, perhaps, or at least the diminution of its strength to such an extent as to have brought forward an honourable repose and lasting tranquillity to Europe. Let me ask the house, whether or not every man did not believe it was the policy and the aim of France to use all endeavours to separate the confederacy against her? Let me ask, whether she did not seem to triumph even in the hope of being able to effect it? Let me ask, whether any thing remained of the hope of France but this separation, to enable her to dictate to Europe? Let me ask, whether any thing could, therefore, be so desirable to France as the detaching of that confederacy, which, for the honour and safety of Europe, was formed against her? And then, let me ask, whether there ever was, or could be, a cause in which it would be more the duty of every good man to prevent any jealousy, or the rising of any suspicion, or the creating of any disunion, among those who, if they remain entire, may yet give honourable and lasting peace to Europe? If the directory have yet any hope of dictating terms to Europe, it is, no doubt, on the same policy which they have hitherto found so beneficial, that they ground their expectations of future success. If there is any thing by which they can expect to attain this situation of proud eminence, this object of their favourite ambition, it is by being able to instil

jealousy, to sow the seeds of division, and engender sources of animosity among those of the confederacy, who yet remain united to oppose their power. On preserving entire the remains of that confederacy, depends the only hope of impressing on them a conviction of the necessity of yielding to reasonable terms, and of bringing the war to a desirable conclusion. And perhaps, in this point of view, an attention to the preservation of that confederacy becomes a duty, not only for ministers, but for all those persons who are anxious for the public welfare, and interested in the national character; for all those who are desirous of an honourable peace, and adverse to any peace purchased with dishonour: and, if such be the case, it is important for them to consider whether the measures which they may wish to persuade government to adopt, be such as may oblige the country to give up the chance of a successful peace altogether, or to take it on terms inconsistent with the honour of the nation. If we receive propositions of peace on the terms of the honourable gentleman, the considerations "speedy and honourable," then become separated. We must, in that case, chuse the alternative; if we adopt the motion, a peace, "speedy and honourable" we cannot have. But an honourable peace we may have, if we persevere in the same firm and vigorous line of conduct which we have hitherto pursued. This I know, not from any immediate communication with the enemy, not from any communication of their disposition for peace, but from the statement which they have themselves furnished of their defective and almost exhausted means for carrying on the war. On this ground I oppose the motion. If I were not sincerely and anxiously desirous of peace, I should be forfeiting my duty to the country, and violating the trust which I hold from my public situation; but I can never consent to the proposition of peace, unless the terms should be consistent with our present honour, suitable to our present condition, and compatible with our future security.

Having said this with the general view I have of the subject of peace, if the question be thought a necessary one, I will say

a few words as to the message from his Majesty to parliament about two months ago, because it was said, that no step had been taken since for a negociation; I hope the house will recollect what I said upon that occasion. I said then, that the house should not compel, by its vote, the executive government to enter into a negociation, bound down and fettered with any acknowledgment of our own weakness: precisely the same thing do I desire of the house upon the present occasion. Those who differ from me in general, and who have thought the war altogether unnecessary, I did not then, nor do I now, expect to convince; but the house at large thought as I do. To the house at large, therefore, I will now say, that the question, as the honourable gentleman has himself stated it, is a very narrow one—"Whether, because after having received the message from his Majesty no communication has taken place of any subsequent measures, the house, by adopting a motion of this sort, ought to compel the executive government, bound hand and foot, to commence a negociation?" If the honourable gentleman entertains such distrust of the sincerity of ministers, as to suppose them disposed to take no measures to carry into effect their own declarations, I shall certainly not argue with him on that point. But in order to be consistent, the argument of the honourable gentleman must infer, either that overtures have been made on the part of the enemy, or that some favourable opportunity has occurred to this country for the purpose of commencing negociation, which have been rejected subsequent to the period of the message.

If a negociation should be entered into, it is evident, that in order to give it its full effect, we should be careful not only to keep up the strict letter of our engagements with our allies, but to maintain with them full concert and harmony. I therefore, take upon me to assert, that since his Majesty's message has been delivered to this house, ministers have taken every measure consistent with the general interests of the country, and with the attention and regard due to her allies, to enable his

Majesty to take any opportunity, either to meet overtures for negociation, or to make such overtures as might be found most expedient. That no etiquette with respect to who should make the first overture—no difficulty in finding a mode of making it, appeared to government to be an obstacle to negociation, if in other respects there appeared to be a probability of leading to just and honourable terms; the great point being what prospect there was of obtaining such terms. Measures have been taken to ascertain these points, and are now in train; and if the enemy are sincere, they must speedily lead to a negociation. Whether that negociation will lead to peace I cannot say, because that depends upon whether the exhausted state of the enemy will incline them to set on foot that negociation with a view to peace, very different as to the terms of it from any which their public declarations have for a long time past seemed to indicate: if this is not the case, I must say a speedy peace is impossible. I wish ardently for peace—but not for any but an honourable peace. The country has a right to expect it from its own strength and resources, and from a knowledge of the relative situation of France.

I admit that the honourable gentleman in his speech separated negociation from the terms. But in other passages he talked of negociation as leading to an immediate peace. I do not hold out a prospect of immediate peace, nor do I state any period that I can ascertain for it; I only say it will not be the fault of his Majesty's servants if the period is remote. The enemy must be however ready to make it on terms which we have a right to think just and honourable; it rests not on us only, but also on the enemy, whether this may lead to any negociation at all, or whether negociation will lead to peace. It all depends on this, whether the disposition of the enemy shall be more moderate than any we have lately seen of their professions. Sorry I am to see such a seeming disposition on the part of the enemy, as may render them, in case of success, desirous of preventing any effect to pacific dispositions, which they may now profess,

or even of retracting them. Whether this may lead to a moderation in practice which I have not seen yet, I know no more of, as I have said already, than what any other gentleman has an opportunity of knowing. What has been made public I hope is not authentic; however, by what has been circulated in this country, and through the Continent with industry, and what they are said to hold out as the boon of peace to the English nation, it does not appear as if they were very desirous of meeting us on honourable terms; for I have heard that they are ready to give peace, because the government of England asks it. Thus then we are to have peace if we shall sue for it; that is, if we shall abandon that for which our ancestors have fought so bravely. If we shall abandon our allies; if we shall abandon the safety of all Europe, and sacrifice to France every thing that is dear to us, and offer to them homage, and grant them an unconditional and uncompensated restitution of all that has been their's, and all that has been in the possession of those whom they have forced to be their allies—then, in return for this, they will offer to the people of England their fraternization.

I have thus stated the degree to which we have been ready to go. I hope I shall not be told some weeks hence I have been insincere. We have not been ready to grasp at a treaty such as you have heard from me. There is but one situation in which a minister of this country should convey such terms to the enemies of it: that is, when the abjectness of the country and its willingness to sue for peace is proclaimed by parliament, so as to deprive us of vigour and energy, and make us unwilling to strive for the maintenance of ourselves. If this motion be adopted, what overtures we shall receive, or what we shall not, I will not pretend to determine; but while we shew any confidence in our resources, I do not fear that a negociation of measures that are in train may prove effectual: at what period, for reasons I have already stated, it is impossible for me to imagine. I am not apprehensive that parliament will not leave this to take the course which the practice of our ancestors lays down to

us, and which reason dictates. I say, if we and our allies are not false to each other and ourselves, we shall have an opportunity of restoring to Europe peace, on safe, just, and honourable grounds, and nothing but a premature motion like the present, can deprive us of that blessing; and therefore, as a lover of my country, and of justice, I oppose this motion.

The motion passed in the negative;

Ayes 50
Noes 189

February 26, 1796.

Mr. William Smith having on a former day submitted to the House a string of resolutions upon the subject of the late loan, setting out with establishing the principle of an open and public competition, and, by a series of facts and deductions, asserting the conclusion—that the loan, then under consideration, was a bad and improvident one for the public, and that the minister in conducting the negociation, and in adjusting the terms, had been guilty of a departure from his own principles, and of a breach of his duty:—the debate on this important question was resumed this day.

Upon the first resolution being moved. "That it appears to this House, that the principle of making loans for the public service, by free and open competition, uniformly professed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, has been very generally recognized, as affording the fairest prospect of public advantage."

Mr. Sylvester Douglas, in a speech of considerable detail, moved an amendment, to leave out all the words of the resolution after the words "public service," and to insert other words, which would make the amended question stand as follows, "That it appears to this House, that the principle of making loans for the public service by competition, which was introduced, and has in general been acted upon, by the present Chancellor of the Exchequer, has been productive in many instances of great public advantage; but that this principle could not be applied in its full extent to the bargain for the late loan, consistently with the peculiar circumstances of the case, and with that attention to the equitable claims of individuals, which ought always to be shewn in transactions with them on the behalf of the public."

Mr. Pitt:——

On a subject naturally so interesting to my personal feelings, as well as so important in a public view, I am anxious to address the house at a period of the debate, before their attention is more exhausted. And they will forgive me when I am called upon to meet a charge of the most direct and important nature, in which my personal character, as well as my official situation, as a trustee for the public, are materially implicated, and which has been so diligently and ably pursued, (though I might be content to rest my defence on the impression of the arguments and facts which have been brought forward by my honourable friends) if, even at the hazard of some repetition, I should advert to the points which press most closely upon my own immediate feelings. Indeed I should not do justice to myself, far less should I do justice to the public, if I did not state them in as plain and intelligible a way as possible; at the same time, I will endeavour to reply shortly to many things that have been asserted so much at large in the speech of the honourable gentleman, who brought forward the subject, and were likewise repeated at considerable length in the resolutions and papers before the house.

The honourable gentleman*, who has lately spoken, said, that if my answer to one point was satisfactory, he would withdraw his support from the charge against me. Though, in the course of what I have to say, I shall not be inattentive to his question, it cannot be expected that I should narrow my defence to that point. It cannot be supposed that from any recent declarations which have been made by the honourable gentlemen, exculpating me from all charge of personal corruption, that from any equivocal and imperfect disclaimers, accompanied, when retracted, by artful suggestions and fresh insinuations, I should have forgotten that it was broadly stated by gentlemen on the other side, who moved for a committee of inquiry, that there was ground of suspicion that the distribution of the loan had

* Mr. Francis.

been employed for the purpose of corrupt influence. They exempted me, indeed, from any charge of having regulated that distribution from any view of sordid gain to myself; and I then took the liberty to say, feeling as I did on the subject, that I was not obliged to them for the exception, or the sort of candour that dictated it. If they formerly asserted that, if the inquiry was gone into, and substantiated, the result would be, to establish the actual interference of corrupt influence; if such declarations were rash and unguarded; if they were dictated by the intemperate warmth of debate, or pushed beyond all bounds of justifiable discretion, and if they are now retracted as unjust and unfounded, I certainly have reason to rejoice in the progress which has been made, in consequence of the diligent and sober investigation of a committee towards a decision so much more grateful to my character and feelings. Undoubtedly there is no charge which can be brought against the transaction of the loan, there is no instance of neglect, there is no error of judgment, there is no want of prudence, which I should not most seriously and severely regret; but still I should consider such charges as light, compared with that which formed the prominent point, and the most weighty one in the present accusation, viz. that in the transaction of the late loan, I had acted on motives of corruption, partiality, and undue influence, to answer political and interested purposes, both within and without doors. I cannot therefore help remarking, that while the ground on which the inquiry was originally brought forward, "that the loan had been employed as the means of corrupt and pernicious influence," is now professed to be abandoned, instead of being, as the house had a right to expect, either substantiated by proof, or wholly and completely done away, it seems to be but half retracted by the honourable mover of the resolution, and to be supplied by ambiguous hints and fresh insinuations. After avowing that it was his opinion, that the committee ought to have asked for no lists, he discovers a strange coincidence between the names in the list of subscribers, and the names of a certain respectable body

of merchants and bankers, assembled for a great object of political discussion; a coincidence which could not be the effect of accident. If this be true, and the fact originated in design, most certainly that design must have arisen from a corrupt motive; and if not for personal gain, that motive must have resulted from a desire to obtain the means of corrupt influence.

The honourable gentleman* brings no such charge against me. His mode of acquittal is, however, somewhat singular; he imputes to me no motive of corrupt influence or undue partiality. He desires me to say nothing of the transaction relative to the Hamburgh bills, on which nevertheless some part of the resolutions is founded, and which has been ascribed to the motive of a determination to reward the services of an individual by a sacrifice of the public interest. The right honourable gentleman therefore openly disclaims all accusation, while he supports the resolutions which contain the very charge he so much affects to disclaim, drawn up with all the art and address of the most cunning special pleader; and certainly no resolutions could be more ably drawn up, if the avowed purpose of them had been to censure and undermine any man's public and private character. The honourable gentleman's ability in the management of this point has been really singular. — He acquits me of any intention of benefiting myself, or corrupting parliament by means of the loan; but then insists that the loan was improperly made, and that it must have been so made for some undue motive or other; that is to say, he acquits me of two specific undue motives, and exhorts me not to speak, in order that I may leave myself undefended against the suspicion of an endless train of indefinite undue motives, which ingenious insinuation and artful malice may think proper to raise against me. I do not deny that the nature of a transaction may be such as to afford ground for the suspicion of an undue motive, even though the motive itself may not appear on the face of the transaction. If the transaction however be pecuniary, there

* Mr. Francis.

are only three motives which can be supposed to operate—personal emolument, private partiality, and public influence; and if, after the most accurate investigation, strong evidence be brought to prove that none of these motives can be traced in the present transaction, I have some right to take to myself credit that no such motives existed, and that the charge has been fully refuted.

The honourable gentleman who moved the resolutions, stated that the committee had decided that there was no ground for suspicion of any corrupt interference; and thus, so far as their judgment went, had put their negative on that ground, on which the inquiry had originally been undertaken. The last speaker * on the other side has stated, that he disliked the mode in which that committee was constituted. It might have been supposed that a committee, which afforded to every man, who was actuated by jealousy, suspicion, by public zeal, or, if such a motive could be supposed to insinuate itself, by private pique, an opportunity to state his sentiments, and to display his vigilance, was of all others the least liable to objection. It seemed, indeed, probable, in the first instance, that it would be deprived of the assistance of two honourable gentlemen† whose abilities and diligence none would dispute. These honourable gentlemen, when it was declared that the committee should be an open one, and that all who attended should have voices, had, upon due deliberation no doubt, desired their names to be withdrawn, and seemed to consider themselves as disgraced by being put in a situation in which they should only exercise their privilege in common with every member of that house. I am happy, however, to find that these gentlemen revised their first decision, that both assisted in the committee, and that one of them in particular distinguished himself by his active and constant attendance. It is rather singular that the decision of the committee, by which they negative all idea of corrupt interference, is the only one which the honourable mover conceives to be already so well recog-

* Mr. Francis. † Mr. Sheridan and Mr. Grey.

nized, that he excludes it from that string of resolutions which he has presented as an analysis of the whole report.

Another honourable gentleman states, that he thinks on that point the committee have no right to give an opinion, and he has declared so this day for the first time. If there is any thing forcible in this objection, it certainly is very unfair to bring it forward now for the first time. Why was it not stated when the report was received? If the house had then thought that their committee had exceeded their powers, the report would have been re-committed. But why is that opinion expressed by the committee? They assign it as a reason for not having given a particular detail of evidence, which by the resolution of the house they were required to give, and which they had declined to bring forward, on the ground that it was inconvenient to individuals. It is surely a little hard that gentlemen should first receive the whole of the evidence the committee thought right to report, and then not admit the excuse for the omission of that part of the evidence which was principally exculpatory of the person whose conduct was the object of censure.

An honourable gentleman complains, that there was a want of notice of the intention to come to such a resolution in the committee. Notice was however given the day before by my right honourable friend* who spoke last, and who had not only answered that point, but also explained the individual use that had been made of the word "colleagues;" which meant to apply generally to all, who attended the committee, who certainly were colleagues on that inquiry and not merely official persons; and I cannot admit that it was not likely that so attentive and so able a man as the chairman of that committee would have allowed any important resolution to be adopted without a fair notice, even if there had been such a want of attention and industry in those gentlemen on the other side, who took a principal share in the investigation, as to afford any room for such a charge. I therefore think myself entitled to assume the benefit of that opinion of the committee, not with

* Mr. Steele.

those qualifications, equivocations, and reserves, with which it has been fettered by the honourable mover of the resolutions, but as a clear, full, and decided testimony, that there was no distribution of the loan for the purpose of corrupt influence. As to the other charges of undue partiality to any individual for services supposed to have been performed to the government, it shortly resolves itself into the question, whether, by the mode of settling the loan, I have contrived to enrich Mr. Boyd, by a sacrifice of the public interest? I am aware it has been said that no such charge was meant to be conveyed; but why should such frequent allusion have been made to the Hamburgh bills, except for that express purpose? They would not have been mentioned had it not been with a view to give countenance to such an insinuation. I shall not, however, now fully enter into the nature of that transaction, as an opportunity will soon be presented when it shall be brought forward as an object of separate inquiry. I will only at present shortly state the substance.

In every loan bill, parliament inserts a clause holding out a premium for the prompt payment of the sums subscribed, foreseeing that government may possibly have occasion for the money before the instalments become due in the regular course of payment. Last year, though large sums were paid up, still the public exigences were such as to render additional supplies necessary, and the terms offered were not sufficiently tempting to induce individuals to come forward with their money. Under these circumstances government entered into a negociation with a monied house to advance such sums as were wanted for the service. The aid of parliament at that time could not be had without calling it together at a great trouble and inconvenience, both public and private. In consequence of this treasury warrants were offered; but Mr. Boyd said, that bills of exchange were a more mercantile commodity; and, to avoid the expense of stamps, they were dated at Hamburgh, to make them foreign bills of exchange, they otherwise being inland and subject to a stamp.

In the whole transaction, however, there was nothing questionable or suspicious, nothing unwarrantable on the part of government which gave Mr. Boyd an exclusive right, far less a discretionary power, to dictate the terms of a future loan.—So much for the subject and substance of the transaction, by far the most material part of every such transaction; the bills themselves were nothing more than mere forms of security to those who advanced the money. The giving them was only an engagement on the part of government to make good the sums advanced for the public. Whether that engagement was executed on stampt or unstampt paper, whether written on paper or on parchment, added nothing to the validity of the security. The particular manner of executing it, was such as was dictated by the necessary regard for secrecy. As to the case of a merchant, in whom it was affirmed such a transaction would be highly discreditable and suspicious, there was nothing in common between the conduct of a merchant in the management of his private affairs, and that of the government of a great country under the pressure of public exigences. No comparison would, therefore, hold for a moment. It might reasonably be suspected, that a merchant resorted to such a mode of transacting business in order to supply the deficiency of his capital, and to support a fictitious credit. In the case of government, the sums were already voted, they were only wanted for immediate service, and funds were provided to reimburse those who advanced them as soon as their claims became due. But was this a service of such magnitude and importance, as to be conceived to give Mr. Boyd such strong claims upon government as could be construed into a right to dictate the terms of the loan? Mr. Boyd never had entertained such an idea, and I confess that this part of the transaction was executed with the same liberality and zeal as every other service to government which he has undertaken to perform. It is supposed that, in order to reward Mr. Boyd, the most likely method which I could devise, was to bestow upon him a loan of such considerable extent, in which he only

is a holder among many others. Is it probable that in order to reward him individually, the chancellor of the exchequer, at a time of severe pressure, and when under the necessity of making such large demands from the house, should add eight or ten per cent. to the public burthens of the year?

All this, however, turned upon a question of evidence, and with respect to the evidence before the committee, it is a principle in human nature, that where persons give evidence in a case which involves their own interests and merits, their judgments will imperceptibly and involuntarily be biassed to one side of the question; and all such evidence requires to be weighed with the most scrupulous attention, and to be received with some qualification. I am sure I mean to say nothing offensive or disrespectful to either gentleman, but I apply this principle equally to Mr. Boyd and to Mr. Morgan. How far Mr. Boyd had a share in the transaction of the Hamburgh bills, and how far that had any influence on the disposition of the loan, appears from the testimony of that gentleman himself. He declares that he formed no claim from that circumstance; that he had not the smallest expectation of any preference, nor did he conceive that such an idea existed. And it is to be remarked, that Boyd's evidence was clear and consistent with itself, distinct, plain, and explicit, while Morgan's, in many material points, was inconsistent, and not only contradicted by himself, but by every authority and evidence that was confronted with it. After stating that the governor of the bank had warned him of something, which was likely to secure to Mr. Boyd a preference to the loan, he had, Mr. Morgan says, upon being questioned, more particularly affirmed, that he had not mentioned what that something was. Afterwards he said, that the governor of the bank described the transaction of the Hamburgh bills, as likely to secure a preference to Mr. Boyd. So much for Mr. Morgan contradicting himself. The governor of the bank, upon being examined, expressly stated, that he had not mentioned a syllable about the bills; that he had only said, that Mr. Boyd had a claim from the loan of last year, which he con-

ceived him to be too sagacious to allow to escape him. If I had determined to avail myself of an opportunity to throw the loan, at all events, into the hands of Mr. Boyd, could I not have found some better mode of achieving my purpose, than that which I pursued? Should I have held out the system of competition? Should I have deliberately announced my intention for that purpose, and have invited competitors, when I was aware that the result could tend only to beget animosity and disappointment? Should I have expressed my reluctance to the claims of Mr. Boyd, and yielded to them only upon the conviction that they were well founded? If nothing was got by the intention which I at first announced of a free competition, but increasing difficulty, and accumulated embarrassment, as to the mode in which the bargain was ultimately settled, is not this internal evidence better than any parole proof that can be adduced, that I was completely sincere in the month of October, when I first announced that intention, and that I had formed no determination to benefit Mr. Boyd at any rate, by giving him a preference? I had not then examined his claim, because it had not then been stated to me so distinctly, and because it had not been brought to my recollection by the governor of the bank. If, then, I was under the influence of error, it was because I carried the system of competition strong in my mind, and because, looking solely to that, I neglected, in the first instance, to attend sufficiently to the claims of Mr. Boyd, and kept them back longer than, as it afterwards appeared to me, in justice I ought to have done.

As to the injury which Mr. Morgan and his friends may have suffered, from having prepared their money in order to bid, that surely cannot be seriously insisted on, while it is recollected that the final adjustment of every loan is matter of so much uncertainty, and connected with so many collateral considerations. No communication from the bank, as to competition, ever took place, except with respect to Mr. Boyd. How could Mr. Morgan contend, that he had sustained injury from having prepared his property to qualify himself to be a bidder, when

he stated, that, till the 23d of November, he never began to doubt that there would be a competition. His own account of his information on this subject was rather whimsical; it came from a confidential friend, of whom he knew nothing, who informed him that he had heard, from a third person, that Boyd was sure of the loan; and yet, though his information led him to know more than the rest of the world, he went on with his speculations, and never doubted that there would be a competition till the twenty-third of November; he therefore would not be responsible for any loss that the parties might sustain from such speculations. All lists or plans that were handed about were merely speculations, particularly Morgan's; and if the parties have sustained any injury, it lies entirely with him and themselves.

The next point was the nature of Boyd's claim, and the impropriety of departing from the system of competition. As to the claim of Mr. Boyd, it has been proved that I, at first, testified strong prejudices and great reluctance, which were not overcome till it was brought forward in a shape in which it was no longer controvertible; that I admitted the principle of competition, and receded from it only when fair and just grounds were adduced on the part of an individual to warrant a deviation from the general system. Here a great deal of minute criticism has been displayed by gentlemen on the other side, with respect to Mr. Boyd's letter. I was in the situation of a judge trying a cause between Mr. Boyd and the public; acting as a trustee for the latter on the one hand, and a person called upon to decide on the justice of the claim of an individual on the other. The claim of Mr. Boyd may have been asserted too strongly, or the contrary might have been the case. Was the consideration of the manner in which his cause was urged, however, to have any influence on my mind in the decision on the justice of his claims? I now stand here accused. I have been placed in the high situation of a judge, and now I appear in the more humble one of a person accused, defending myself against a foul charge. It has been said that I was bound to pay no attention to the claims

of Mr. Boyd for a preference, because there was no express agreement, no specific terms of engagement for that purpose. Gentlemen seem to think that unless government were bound down by specific terms, an engagement of this sort entered into by them should not be abided by; might there not, however, be some common understanding, some implied condition, some strong and clear construction, equally binding on the minister of the country to the observance of the claim in point of honour and justice? No personal inconvenience shall ever induce me to depart from the terms of what I consider an honourable dealing, when a claim is made up founded on an understood and implied condition, on the nature of things, and a practice recognized by a constant usage. Had there been an express agreement, it would have unquestionably been presented to my recollection, but this was no reason why an explanation properly understood, and clearly made out, should not receive its due degree of attention. In transacting all loans, there must be preliminary points of conversation; a good deal of discussion naturally takes place, some particulars of which are committed to memorandums, and others suffered to pass more loosely.

In the loan of 1795, it was proposed by the contractors that there should be no payment on any new loan till February of the succeeding year, to which I readily assented, not conceiving that the exigencies of the public service would require any money to be advanced before that period. Of this promise I was reminded by the governor of the bank of England, and I was the more confirmed in its propriety, as I found that no new loan had taken place in such circumstances, even where no assurance direct, or by implication, had been given.

Mr. Pitt then noticed the connexion in which contractors stood with government, distinct from the scrip-holders, and which gave to them particular claims. Contractors had, in the first instance, to treat with ministers, and were immediately responsible for the fulfilment of the term. Government neither could ascertain, nor had any thing to do with, the scrip-holders; they had no claim—were under no engagement; the contractors

were. As to that part of the resolutions which censured the terms of the loan, it was easy for ingenious men to connect or confound facts by stating some that were true, and omitting others that were equally true, so as to make their reasoning upon them apply to the particular purpose for which they were thus drawn up. In this place he would say, that his greatest objections to the resolutions were, that in them the honourable gentleman had contrived to put together a collection of truths, in such a manner as to convey all the malignity and venom of falsehood. He adverted to the term *open and free competition*, from which he was said to have departed, and remarked, that in order to secure the interests of the public, and prevent the manœuvres of designing persons, every competition must, to a certain degree, be qualified—at least by the consideration how far the parties were competent to fulfil their bargain. He never meant any but a system of qualified competition; and from this it was not true, as stated in the resolution, that he had made a total departure. He then justified the propriety of his own conduct, in not having left himself at the mercy of Boyd and Co. but when the qualified competition which he held out was declined by the others, in having taken such precautions as still enabled him to name his own terms. But he was asked, why did he not send the loan back again into the city? What; after it had been rejected by two sets of gentlemen, and when it would come in the less inviting shape of qualified competition! When the most favourable terms could only bring forward three parties, was it probable that the less favourable terms would produce more? When a day was fixed for conversation on the loan, it was necessary that some interval should take place, that the parties might deliberate on the terms; when all was finally arranged, he saw no good that could possibly arise from a delay of forty-eight hours, a period of suspense and uncertainty, of which advantage might be taken to occasion fluctuations in the public funds;—one circumstance that made him determine not to let the contractor leave his house till the bargain was closed. He accounted for the delay which took place between the time

the bargain was made, and its being intimated to the house, by his being disappointed in bringing on the budget, as he first intended, on the 2d of December. It was well known to the house, the pressure and importance of the public business which then was in daily agitation, and which totally precluded him from making the necessary arrangements for the budget. He defended the manner in which he had exercised his discretion in making the terms; and having described the state of the country, though by no means so impoverished and exhausted as opposition would represent it, he thought credit was due to those efforts by which government had been able to contract for so large a loan in the fourth year of the war, upon even better terms than had been obtained in former years; which he exemplified by a comparison of this with the last year's loan, which was sanctioned by parliament without a single objection; and would leave it to the house to decide whether, in the present instance, he most deserved their censure or approbation.

The next point was the effect of the king's message; those who knew him best, knew that it was not in his mind when the bargain was made. But if he had foreseen it, he could not have foreseen the rise that took place in the stocks. He was no party to any such fraud; but to whatever cause that temporary rise was to be ascribed, it certainly was not produced by the message only. Whatever ideas of peace or negociation people who wished for it might entertain, there was nothing more in the message than a declaration, that the time was arrived, to which his Majesty had alluded in his speech to parliament. Any one who carried its meaning farther, was either too sanguine in expectation, or intended to raise hopes which could not be realized. Besides the message, there were other collateral causes for the sudden rise of the stocks—the unexpected victories of the Austrians, the increasing distresses of the enemy, the serene and tranquil appearance of affairs at home, compared with that cloudy and turbulent aspect which they bore during the period when the terms of the loan were originally settled (the discussion

of the two bills). All these causes, coupled with the intimation that peace only depended on the disposition of the enemy, combined to give that sudden and extraordinary rise to the funds, which singly they would have failed to produce. After all, the extent of the benefit to the contractors, and of the loss to the public, had been greatly over-rated. An exaggerated statement of figures had been brought forward, in order to be echoed through the country. It had been stated, that the profit upon the loan amounted to 12 per cent. It amounted to this sum only for four days, during which stocks were exceedingly fluctuating; so that altogether it did not bear this price for above a few hours. So that, in order to make out this profit, all the shares must have been disposed of within these few hours, a circumstance which would have brought such a quantity into the market, as must have occasioned a depression, that would greatly have overbalanced the temporary rise. All the profit is stated to centre in the individual contractors, and all the concurring and unforeseen causes, which operated to give so favourable a turn to the terms of the loan, to have been the result of my premeditation. Under these circumstances, I am said to have given away a sum of two millions one hundred and fifty thousand pounds, by the mode of negociating the present loan. With this assertion concludes the charge against me; and with desiring the house to attend to the extravagance of this assertion, I conclude my defence.

On a division, the amendment was carried,

Ayes 171

Noes 23

and Mr. Smith's remaining resolutions were severally put and negatived.

May 10, 1796.

Mr. Fox, in pursuance of the notice he had previously given, this day submitted to the House a motion for an entire change in the system hitherto pursued by ministers in regard to external politics; concluding his speech with moving,

"That an address be presented to his Majesty, most humbly to offer to his royal consideration, that judgment which his faithful commons have formed, and now deem it their duty to declare, concerning the conduct of his ministers in the commencement, and during the progress, of the present unfortunate war. As long as it was possible for us to doubt from what source the national distresses had arisen, we have, in times of difficulty and peril, thought ourselves bound to strengthen his Majesty's government for the protection of his subjects, by our confidence and support. But our duties, as his Majesty's counsellors, and as the representatives of his people, will no longer permit us to dissemble our deliberate and determined opinion that the distress, difficulty, and peril, to which this country is now subjected, have arisen from the misconduct of the king's ministers, and are likely to subsist and increase as long as the same principles which have hitherto guided these ministers shall continue to prevail in the councils of Great Britain.

"It is painful for us to remind his Majesty of the situation of his dominions at the beginning of the war, and of the high degree of prosperity to which the skill and industry of his subjects had, under the safeguard of a free constitution, raised the British empire, since it can only fill his mind with the melancholy recollection of prosperity abused, and of opportunities of securing permanent advantages wantonly rejected. Nor shall we presume to wound his Majesty's benevolence, by dwelling on the fortunate circumstances that might have arisen from the mediation of Great Britain between the powers then at war, which might have ensured the permanence of our prosperity, while it preserved all Europe from the calamities which it has since endured. A mediation which this kingdom was so well fitted to carry on with vigour and dignity, by its power, its character, and the nature of its government, happily removed at an equal distance from the contending extremes of licentiousness and tyranny.

"From this neutral and impartial system of policy, his Majesty's ministers were induced to depart by certain measures of the French government, of which they complained as injurious and hostile to this country. With what justice those complaints were made, we are not now called upon to determine, since it cannot be pretended that the measures of France were of such a nature as to preclude the possibility of adjustment by negociation; and it is

impossible to deny, that the power which shuts up the channel of accommodation must be the real aggressor in war. To reject negociation is to determine on hostilities; and, whatever may have been the nature of the points in question between us and France, we cannot but pronounce the refusal of such an authorized communication with that country, as might have amicably terminated the dispute, to be the true and immediate cause of the rupture which followed.

"Nor can we forbear to remark, that the pretences under which his Majesty's ministers then haughtily refused such authorized communication have been sufficiently exposed by their own conduct, in since submitting to a similar intercourse with the same government.

"The misguided policy which thus rendered the war inevitable, appears to have actuated ministers in their determination to continue it at all hazards. At the same time we cannot but observe, that the obstinacy with which they have adhered to their desperate system is not more remarkable than their versatility in the pretexts upon which they have justified it. At one period the strength, at another the weakness, of the enemy has been urged as motives for continuing the war; the successes, as well as the defeats of the allies, have contributed only to prolong the contest; and hope and despair have equally served to involve us still deeper in the horrors of war, and to entail upon us an endless train of calamities. After the original professed objects had been obtained by the expulsion of the French armies from the territories of Holland and the Austrian Netherlands, we find his Majesty's ministers, influenced either by arrogance, or infatuated by ambition and vain hope of conquests, which, if realized, could never compensate to the nation for the blood and treasure by which they must be obtained, rejecting, unheard, the overtures made by the executive council of France, at a period when the circumstances were so eminently favourable to his Majesty and his allies, that there is every reason to suppose that a negociation, commenced at such a juncture, must have terminated in an honourable and advantageous peace: to the prospects arising from such an opportunity they preferred a blind and obstinate perseverance in a war which could scarce have any remaining object but the unjustifiable purpose of imposing upon France a government disapproved of by the inhabitants of that country. And such was the infatuation of these ministers, that, far from being able to frame a wise and comprehensive system of policy, they even rejected the few advantages that belonged to their own unfortunate scheme. The general existence of a design to interpose in the internal government of France was too manifest not to rouse into active hostility the national zeal of that people: but their particular projects were too equivocal to attract the confidence, or procure the co-operation of those Frenchmen who were disaffected to the government of their country. The nature of these plans was too clear not

to provoke formidable enemies, but their extent was too ambiguous to conciliate useful friends.

"We beg leave further to represent to your Majesty, that at subsequent periods your ministers have suffered the most favourable opportunities to escape of obtaining an honourable and advantageous pacification. They did not avail themselves, as it was their duty to have done, of the unbroken strength of the general confederacy which had been formed against France, for the purpose of giving effect to overtures for negociation. They saw the secession of several powerful states from that confederacy, they suffered it to dissolve without an effort for the attainment of general pacification. They loaded their country with the odium of having engaged it in a combination charged with the most questionable and unjustifiable views, without availing themselves of that combination, for procuring favourable conditions of peace. That from this fatal neglect, the progress of hostilities has only served to establish the evils which certainly might have been avoided by negociation, but which are now confirmed by the events of the war. We have felt that the unjustifiable and impracticable efforts to establish royalty in France, by force, have only proved fatal to its unfortunate supporters. We have seen with regret the subjugation of Holland, and the aggrandizement of the French republic, and we have to lament the alteration in the state of Europe, not only from the successes of the French, but from the formidable acquisitions of some of the allied powers on the side of Poland, acquisitions alarming from their magnitude, but still more so from the manner in which they have been made; thus fatally learning that the war has tended alone to establish the very evils, for the prevention of which it was avowedly undertaken.

"That we now therefore approach his Majesty to assure him, that his faithful commons heard, with the sincerest satisfaction, his Majesty's most gracious message, of the 8th of December, wherein his Majesty acquaints them, that the crisis which was depending, at the commencement of the present session, had led to such an order of things, as would induce his Majesty to meet any disposition to negociation on the part of the enemy, with an earnest desire to give it the fullest and speediest effect, and to conclude a general treaty of peace, whenever it could be effected on just and equitable terms, for himself and his allies.

"That from this gracious communication, they were led to hope for a speedy termination to this most disastrous contest, but that with surprise and sorrow they have now reason to apprehend that three months were suffered to elapse before any steps were taken towards a negociation, or any overtures made by his Majesty's servants.

"With equal surprise and concern they have observed, when a fair and open conduct was so peculiarly incumbent on his Majesty's ministers, considering

the prejudices and suspicions which their previous conduct must have excited in the minds of the French, that, instead of adopting the open and manly manner which became the wisdom, the character, and the dignity of the British nation, they adopted a mode calculated rather to excite suspicion, than to inspire confidence in the enemy. Every expression which might be construed into an acknowledgment of the French republic, or even an allusion to its forms, was studiously avoided: and the minister, through whom this overture was made, was, in a most unprecedented manner, instructed to declare, that he had no authority to enter into any negociation or discussion relative to the objects of the proposed treaty.

"That it is with pain we reflect that the alacrity of his Majesty's ministers in apparently breaking off this incipient negociation, as well as the strange and unusual manner in which it was announced to the ministers of the various powers of Europe, affords a very unfavourable comment on their reluctance in entering upon it, and is calculated to make the most injurious impression respecting their sincerity on the people of France. On a review of many instances of gross and flagrant misconduct, proceeding from the same pernicious principles, and directed with incorrigible obstinacy to the same mischievous ends, we deem ourselves bound in duty to his Majesty, and to our constituents to declare, that we see no rational hope of redeeming the affairs of the kingdom but by the adoption of a system radically and fundamentally different from that which has produced our present calamities. Until his Majesty's ministers shall, from a real conviction of past errors, appear inclined to regulate their conduct upon such a system, we can neither give any credit to the sincerity of their professions of a wish for peace, nor repose any confidence in their capacity for conducting a negociation to a prosperous issue. Odious as they are to an enemy, who must still believe them strictly to cherish those unprincipled and chimerical projects which they have been compelled in public to disavow, contemptible in the eyes of all Europe from the display of insincerity and incapacity which has marked their conduct, our only hopes rest on his Majesty's royal wisdom and unquestioned affection for his people, that he will be graciously pleased to adopt maxims of policy more suited to the circumstances of the times than those by which his ministers appear to have been governed, and to direct his servants to take measures, which, by differing essentially as well in their tendency, as in the principle upon which they are founded, from those which have hitherto marked their conduct, may give this country some reasonable hope, at no very distant period, of the establishment of peace suitable to the interests of Great Britain, and likely to preserve the tranquillity of Europe."

The motion being read, Mr. PITT immediately rose:

It is far from being my intention, Sir, unnecessarily to detain the attention of the house, by expatiating at any great length on the various topics introduced into the very long and elaborate speech which you have now heard pronounced. The right honourable gentleman who delivered it, thought proper to lay considerable stress on the authority of a celebrated orator of antiquity*, who established it as a maxim, that, from a retrospect of past errors, we should rectify our conduct for the future; and that if they were errors of incapacity only that had occasioned our misfortunes, and not an absence of zeal, strength, and resources to maintain our cause, and secure our defence, instead of such a disappointment being a cause of despair, it should, on the contrary, invigorate our exertions, and reanimate our hopes. That such a retrospect may, in most cases, be wise and salutary, is a proposition which will hardly be denied. It is evident, that our appeal to experience is the best guard to future conduct, and that it may be necessary to probe the nature of the misfortune, in order to apply a suitable remedy. But in a question so momentous and interesting to the country, as undoubtedly the present question must be, if it can be deemed expedient to run out into a long retrospective view of past calamities, surely it must be far more so to point out the mode by which their fatal effects may be averted, and by proving the origin of the evils complained of, to judge of the nature and efficacy of the remedies to be applied. Whatever, therefore, our present situation may be, it certainly cannot be wise to fix our attention solely on what is past, but rather to look to what still can, and remains to be done. This is more naturally the subject that should be proposed to the discussion of a deliberative assembly. Whatever may have been the origin of the contest in which we are engaged, when all the circumstances attending it are duly considered, it has had the effect of uniting all candid and impartial men, in

* Demosthenes.

acknowledging the undisputed justice of our cause, and the unjust and wanton aggression on the part of the enemy. Such having been, and still, I presume to say, being the more general opinion, prudence then must tell us to dismiss all retrospective views of the subject and to direct the whole of our attention to what our actual situation requires we should do. The right honourable gentleman must have consumed much time in preparing the retrospect he has just taken of our past disasters; and he has consumed much of his time in detailing it to the house; but instead of lavishing away what was so precious on evils which, according to him, admit of no remedy or change, would it not be more becoming him, as a friend to his country, and an enlightened member of this house, to attend to what new circumstances may produce, and to trace out the line of conduct which in the present state of things it would be prudent to pursue?

In the close of his speech the right honourable gentleman alluded to his former professions respecting the prosecution of the war. According to these professions, he, and every gentleman who thought with him, declared, that should the enemy reject overtures of peace, or appear reluctant to enter into negociation, when proposed, then he, and every man in the country would unite in advising the adoption of the most vigorous measures; and that not only such conduct on the part of the enemy would unite every Englishman in the cause, but that while it united England, it must divide France, who would be indignant against whatever government or governors should dare to reject, what was the sincere wish of the majority of its inhabitants. Instead, therefore, of expatiating on the exhausted state of the financial resources of the country, and running into an historical detail of all our past calamities, a subject which almost engrossed the right honourable gentleman's speech, I must beg leave to remind him of those his former professions, and invite him to make good the pledge he has so often given to this house, and to the country, and not to inflame the arrogance and unjust pretensions of the enemy, by an exaggerated statement of our past misfortunes, or of our present inability to retrieve them by a spirited and vi-

gorous prosecution of the war. His feelings as an Englishman, and his duty as a member of parliament, must assuredly induce the right honourable gentleman to exert his abilities in suggesting the most effectual means of insuring our success in the contest, especially since he heard the late arrogant and ambitious professions of the enemy. All retrospective views I therefore for the present must regard as useless, and think it far more wise and urgent to provide for the success of future exertions; not that I decline entering into the retrospect to which I am challenged, which I am ready to do with the indulgence of the house, but because I feel it of more serious importance to call your attention, not to the retrospect alone, but rather to the actual state of things, which the right honourable gentleman has entirely omitted.

And, first, let me observe, that, while I endeavour to follow the right honourable gentleman through his very long detail of facts and events, I shall follow him as they bear on a particular conclusion which he wishes to draw from them, but which the country does not call for, and which it will not admit. What is the conclusion to which he wishes to lead us? Does it not go to record a confession and retractation of our past errors? an avowal that, instead of a just and necessary war, to which we were compelled by an unprovoked aggression, we are embarked in a contest in which we wantonly and unjustly engaged, while our defence is evidently such as our dearest interests call for, and which a regard to justice, and to every moral principle, legitimates and sanctifies? Can, then, this house adopt a motion, which directly contradicts its recorded opinions, and which tends to force on it new councils; or, in other words, to oblige it to rescind all the resolutions it has come to since the commencement of the war? The right honourable gentleman has, in rich and glowing colouring, depicted our exhausted resources; the want of vigour in our measures, and the inattention of ministers to seize on the more favourable opportunities for making peace. He also assumes, that the sole cause of the war, was the restoration of monarchy in France; and that this cause after-

wards shifted into various other complexions. All these charges, however, as well as the unjustness of the war, he establishes only by presumption. The right honourable gentleman then goes back to 1792, when he says the first opportunity was offered of our procuring peace to Europe, but of which ministers did not avail themselves. He also refers to a speech made by me on the opening of the budget of that year, which he describes as having been uttered in a tone of great satisfaction, triumph, and exultation. It is true, indeed, that I felt much satisfaction in exhibiting to the country the high degree of prosperity to which it had then reached;—not less satisfaction, I am sure, than the honourable gentleman seems to feel in giving the melancholy picture that his motion has now drawn of its present reduced situation; and I felt the more vivid satisfaction in viewing that prosperity, as it enabled us to prepare for, and enter into, a contest of a nature altogether unprecedented. Now, however, when that prosperity is over, the honourable gentleman dwells on it rather rapturously, though it seemed little to affect him at the time it was enjoyed. But, not only are ministers accused of having neglected the opportunities of making peace, but when they have attempted overtures of that nature, they are charged with insincerity, or with holding forth something in the shape and make of these overtures that must create suspicions of their sincerity in the enemy, or provoke their disgust. What can countenance such an accusation, I am sadly at a loss to discover: for at the periods alluded to, every motive of public duty, every consideration of personal ease, must have induced me to exert the best of my endeavours to promote a peace, by which alone I could be enabled to effect the favourite objects I had in view, of redeeming the public debt and the 4 per cents. as alluded to by the honourable gentleman. No stronger proofs could be given of the sincerity of government to promote and ensure peace, than was then given by his Majesty's ministers; and if they were disappointed, the fault is not with them, but their conduct must be understood and justified by the imperious necessity, which in 1793 compelled them to resist an unprovoked aggression. As to

the accusations urged against us of not offering our mediation, or even refusing it when solicited, they are equally of little weight. Are ministers to be blamed, for what it would be hazardous in them to attempt, and would it not be hazardous to propose a mediation where both parties were not ready to agree? To have erected ourselves into arbiters, could only expose us to difficulties and disputes, if we were determined, as we ought to be, to enforce that mediation on the parties who refused to admit it. And what is the great use which the honourable gentleman seems to be so eager to derive from that peace, if so procured? Is it fit that we should go to war in order to prevent the partition of Poland? In general policy, I am ready to confess, that this partition is unjust; but it does not go, as is said, to overturn the balance of power in Europe, for which the right honourable gentleman, as it suits his argument, expresses greater or less solicitude; for that country being nearly divided equally between three great powers, it can little contribute to the undue aggrandizement of either. But how strange did it seem in that right honourable gentleman, who inveighed so strongly against the partition of Poland, to censure ministers for their endeavours to prevent the partition of Turkey, when it was the establishment of the principle, that this country could not interfere to prevent the partition of Turkey, precluded the possibility of any interference with respect to Poland!

As to the latter transactions that have occurred between this country and France, they are too recent in the memory of the house, to require that I should call their attention to them. The resolutions to which we have come on this subject, are too sacred and too solemn, the opinion too settled and too deeply formed, to be lightly reversed. We cannot, surely, forget the first cause of complaint, allowed to be well founded, and the famous decree of the 19th of November, which was an insult and an outrage on all civilized nations. Seditious men, delegated from this country, with treason in their mouths, and rebellion in their hearts, were received, welcomed, and caressed by the legislature of France. That government, without

waiting until it had even established itself, declared hostilities against all the old established systems: without having scarcely an existence in itself, it had the presumption to promise to interpose to the destruction of all the existing governments in the world. All governments alike fell under its vengeance; the old forms were contemned and reprobated; those which had stood the test of experience, whether monarchy, aristocracy, or mixed democracy, were all to be destroyed. They declared that they would join the rebellious subjects of any state to overturn their government. And what was the explanation received from M. Chauvelin on these subjects of complaint? Did it amount to any more than that the French would not intermeddle with the form of government in other countries, unless it appeared that the majority of the people required it to be changed? As to their declaration against aggrandizement, without stopping to argue a point that is so extremely clear, I will only refer the house to their whole conduct towards Belgium. They declared that they would never interfere in the government of Belgium, after it had consolidated its liberties;—a strange way of declining interference when a form of constitution was forced upon it, bearing the name, but not the stamp of liberty, and compelling the Belgians to consolidate and preserve it. With respect to another cause of war, viz. the opening of the Scheldt, their explanations regarding that circumstance, and their intentions upon Holland, were equally unsatisfactory; their ultimatum was, that they would give no further satisfaction; and their refusing a fair explanation made them the aggressors in reality, if not in form. Still, however, the channel of negociation was not cut off by this country: as long as the king of France retained a shadow of power, M. Chauvelin continued to be received in an official capacity; and even after the cruel catastrophe of that unfortunate monarch, his Majesty's minister at the Hague did not refuse to communicate with general Dumourier, when he expressed a wish to hold a conference with him relative to some proposals of peace. When all these opportunities had been offered and neglected, they

declared war, and left us no choice, in form or in substance, but reduced us to the necessity of repelling an unjust aggression. In every point of view, they therefore were evidently the aggressors, even according to the right honourable gentleman's own principles, and we certainly took every precaution, that it was either fit, or possible to do, to avoid it.

I cannot help wishing to recal the attention of the house to the general conclusion of what I have stated, for upon that rests all I have to say on the first part of the right honourable gentleman's propositions. If the house had been hurried by passion into the war, if it had been hurried by the false opinion of others, or by any unjust pretensions of its own, would it go to the enemy to atone for its misconduct, and accede to such conditions as the enemy might offer? Could it happen that a war not ordinarily just and necessary, when applied to every moral principle, should in form be so untrue, that, after three years standing, it should be found all illusion? If the house cannot acknowledge these things, much less can I believe, admitting all the depreciated statements of our resources to be true, and founded to such an extent as to make us submit almost to any humiliation, that last of all we should submit to the pride and ambition of an enemy, whose hypocrisy, injustice, tyranny, and oppression we have so repeatedly witnessed, reprobated, and deplored: and yet that was what the right honourable gentleman proposed. He proposed that we should bow down before the enemy, with the cord about our necks, when we have not felt the self-reproach of doing wrong; to renounce and abjure our recorded professions, and receive a sentence of condemnation, as severe as undeserved. This I contend would be to renounce the character of Britons. Even if, by the adverse fortune of war, we should be driven to sue for peace, I hope we shall never be mean enough to acknowledge ourselves guilty of a falsehood and injustice, in order to obtain it.

The right honourable gentleman's next accusation against ministers is, that they have been guilty of a radical error, in

not acknowledging the French republic. It is said this has been the bar to all treaty: this has prevented every overture in subsequent situations. I admit that it has so happened, that we have never acknowledged the republic, and I admit also, that no application nor overture for peace, on the part of this country, has been made till lately. I admit, that after the siege of Valenciennes, I did say it was not then advisable to make conditions, and I admit also, that when we struggled under disadvantages, I was equally averse: whence the right honourable gentleman infers, "that if you will not treat for peace when you are successful, nor treat for it when you are unfortunate, there must be some secret cause, which induces us to believe you are not disposed to treat at all." Is it reasonable, I ask, when a just hope is entertained of increasing our advantages, to risk the opportunity which those advantages would secure of making better terms; or, is it reasonable when we experience great and deplorable misfortunes, to entertain a just apprehension of obtaining a permanent and honourable peace, on fair and permanent conditions? These are the principles on which I have acted, and they are raised upon the fair grounds of human action. If success enough were gained to force the enemy to relinquish a part of their possessions, and we might not yet hope to be wholly relieved from similar dangers, except by a repetition of similar efforts and similar success, was it inconsistent for a lover of his country to push those efforts further upon the reasonable expectation of securing a more permanent and honourable peace? And, on the other hand, when we experienced the sad reverse of fortune, when the spirit of our allies was broken, our troops discomfited, our territories wrested from us, and all our hopes disconcerted and overthrown, did it argue a want of reason or a want of prudence not to yield to the temporary pressure? The same situations to a well-tempered mind would always dictate the same mode of conduct. In carrying on the war, we have met with misfortunes, God knows, severe and bitter! Exclusive of positive acquisitions however, have we gained nothing by the change which has taken place in France?

If we had made peace, as the right honourable gentleman says we ought to have done, in 1793, we should have made it before France had lost her trade; before she had exhausted her capital; before her foreign possessions were captured, and her navy destroyed. This is my answer to every part of the right honourable gentleman's speech relative to making peace at those early periods.

But a discussion is once more introduced as to the object of the war. Ministers have repeatedly and distinctly stated the object, but it is a custom, on the other side of the house, to take unguarded and warm expressions of individuals in favour of the war, for declarations of ministers. Thus, many things which fell from that great man (Mr. Burke) have since been stated as the solemn declaration of government; though it is known that, to a certain extent, there is a difference between ministers and that gentleman upon this subject. But then it is to be taken as clear, that ministers are not only anxious for the restoration of monarchy in France, but the old monarchy with all its abuses. That ministers wished to treat with a government in which jacobin principles should not prevail, that they wished for a government from which they could hope for security, and that they thought a monarchy the most likely form of government to afford to them these advantages, is most undoubtedly true; but that ministers ever had an idea of continuing the war for the purpose of re-establishing the old government of France, with all its abuses, I solemnly deny. If, for the reasons I have before stated, it would not have been prudent to have made a peace in the early stage of our contest, surely it would not have been advisable when the enemy were inflated with success. The fate of the campaign of 1794 turned against us upon as narrow a point as I believe ever occurred. We were unfortunate, but the blame did not rest here: that campaign led to the conquest of Holland, and to the consternation which immediately extended itself among the people of Germany and England. What, however, was the conduct of ministers at that period? If they had given way to the alarm, they would have

been censurable indeed: instead of doing so, they immediately sent out expeditions to capture the Dutch settlements, which we may now either restore to the stadtholder, if he should be restored, or else we may retain them ourselves. If, instead of that line of conduct, his Majesty's ministers had then acknowledged the French republic, does the right honourable gentleman, does the house, suppose that the terms we should then have obtained would have been better than those we can now expect? Then, it was asked, why did not administration negociate for peace before the confederacy was weakened by the defection of Spain and Prussia, because, of course, better terms might have been obtained when the allies were all united, than could be expected after they became divided? It undoubtedly would have been a most advantageous thing, if we could have prevailed upon the kings of Spain and Prussia to have continued the war until the enemy were brought to terms, but that not having been the case, we at least had the advantage of the assistance of those powers, while they remained in the confederacy. Before any blame can attach upon ministers upon this ground, it will be necessary to shew, that, prior to the defection of Prussia and Spain, terms were proposed to us, which we rejected. Whether these two powers have gained much from the peace they have made, is not a question very difficult to be answered. Whether Spain was really in that state that she could not have maintained another campaign, without running the risk of utter destruction, is a point upon which I do not chuse to give an opinion; but, with respect to Prussia, she certainly enjoys the inactivity of peace, but she has all the preparation and expense of war.

The right honourable gentleman again adverts to the form of government which, he says, it was the intention of ministers to establish in France, and alludes, particularly, to the affair at Toulon; and from that subject the honourable gentleman makes a rapid transition to the case of M. de la Fayette. With respect to what might be the treatment of that unfortunate gentleman, the cabinet of Great Britain had no share in it, nor did ministers think themselves warranted in interfering with the allies

upon the subject. With regard to Mr. Lameth, the right honourable gentleman certainly did ministers justice, when he said they could feel no antipathy to that person; and they certainly did feel great reluctance in ordering him to quit the kingdom: but as to the motive which induced them to take that step, they did not conceive it to be a proper subject of discussion. The act of parliament had vested discretion in the executive government, and they must be left to the exercise of it.

The right honourable gentleman has also alluded to the situation of the emigrants, and asserted, that if government were of opinion that there was no prospect of making an attack with success upon France, it was the height of cruelty to have employed them. This, however, was not the case: there were, at different times, well grounded expectations of success against that country, and surely it cannot be considered as cruelty to have furnished the emigrants with the means of attempting to regain their properties and their honours.

The right honourable gentleman has also thought proper, in his speech, to dwell at considerable length on the state of the enemy's finances. He is willing to admit that their finances are, as he says I have stated them to be, in the very gulph of bankruptcy—in their last agonies. But then the right honourable gentleman proceeds to ask me whether, notwithstanding this financial bankruptcy, they have not prosecuted their military operations with increased vigour and success? Whether, notwithstanding these their last agonies, they may not make such dreadful struggles as may bring their adversaries to the grave? I will not now detain the house by contrasting the finances of this country with those of the enemy; I will not now dwell on the impossibility of a nation carrying on a vigorous war, in which it is annually expending one third of its capital; but I will tell the right honourable gentleman that the derangement of the French armies at the latter end of the last campaign, the exhausted state of their magazines and stores, and their ultimate retreat before the allied troops, furnish a convincing proof that the rapid decline of their finances begins to affect in the greatest

degree their military operations. How far their recent successes, on the side of Italy, deserve credit to the extent stated by the right honourable gentleman, I shall not take upon me to say: I have had no intelligence on the subject, and therefore shall offer no opinion to the house.

The next topic which I have to consider, is the argument drawn from the question of our sincerity in the message delivered to the French minister at Basle, on the 8th of March; and a great variety of observations have been suggested and urged upon that point. One inference drawn by the right honourable gentleman, arises from the circumstance of this message having been communicated four months after his Majesty's speech, and three months after the declaration made to parliament, that his Majesty was ready to meet and give effect to any disposition manifested on the part of the enemy for the conclusion of a general peace. In the first place it must be remembered, that neither the speech from the throne, nor the declaration expressed any intention in the British government, to be the first in making proposals for opening a negociation. The fair construction went no farther than to invite the enemy to make the first advances, if they were so disposed, and to shew that no obstacle would be opposed on our part to the capacity of the government they had chosen to negociate terms with this country. Gentlemen, therefore, have no right to feel in any degree disappointed at the delay of the communication, since, in being the first to make any overtures of peace, his Majesty's ministers went beyond any pledge they had given, or any expectation that ought to be entertained.

It has further been objected, that those proposals must be insincere, because it did not appear that on this occasion we had acted in concert with our allies. A sufficient answer to this may be given by the peculiar circumstances of affairs, the lateness of the season, and those communications being cut off, by which we and our allies were before enabled to maintain a ready intercourse. Had this ceremony been complied with, the delay, which it would have occasioned, must unavoidably have been

greater than that of which gentlemen think themselves warranted to complain. They are, however, as much mistaken in their facts, as they are in their inferences, for this step was not taken without previous communication with our allies, and we acted in concert with them, though they were not formally made parties to the proposal; a ceremony which in my opinion would be wholly superfluous.

Another proof, it should seem, of our insincerity is, that, in the message alluded to, we did not recognize the republic. It is truly generous in the right honourable gentleman, generous towards them at least, to find out an objection for the French, which they themselves did not discover. We had the answer of the directory to our note, and they took not the least notice of the republic not having been recognized. If that had been a necessary and indispensable form, without which they considered themselves insulted, their natural conduct would have been to give no answer at all. On this point of recognition, however, the right honourable gentleman is always extremely tender, and has it very much at heart. He holds up the example of America to us, as if it was an instance that had any application to the present question. The right honourable gentleman also boldly contends, that if we had paid the French government this mark of respect and confidence, it would have induced them, in return, to propose more moderate terms. I am, however, very far from expecting any such effect; for, in fact, the government of France never seemed to think of it. I do not consider the omission as an act of hostility, and they must be aware, that the proposal to treat in itself implied a recognition, without which it was impossible that a treaty should be concluded.

To shew the consistency of the arguments on this subject, I shall take the liberty of recalling the attention of the house to those antecedent periods, when the gentleman on the opposite side of the house, in defending the French government, held up to our imitation the wise and temperate conduct of the court of Denmark, which maintained a beneficial neutrality with France,

and with which the latter shewed itself capable of maintaining the necessary relations of amity and peace. It is indeed true, that France has in a great measure respected the neutrality of Denmark, and observed with it the relations of peace, at least, if not of amity. What, however, destroys the right honourable gentleman's argument at once is, that this wise, peaceable, neutral, and amicable court of Denmark had not recognized the French republic till the present year. So that, in fact, Denmark did not consider the French government as one that it ought to acknowledge, till the form which it assumed rendered it in some degree equally admissible in the eyes of the other powers of Europe.

Another argument of insincerity is, that we did not propose terms to the enemy, while we called upon them for theirs. This I conceive to be that which we had no right to do; the application did not come from the enemy, it was made on our part, and it would have been ridiculous to propose any particular terms to them, till we were previously informed whether they were willing to treat at all. It has also been alleged, that we must have been insincere, because when we employed the minister at Basle to make this application, we did not at the same time give him the power to negociate. It was extraordinary indeed that an observation of this kind should be urged by any person who professed the slightest acquaintance with diplomatic proceedings. I would ask the right honourable gentleman whether it was ever known that the person, employed to sound the disposition of a belligerent party, was also considered as the proper minister for discussing all the relative interests, and concluding a treaty? The house must remember, on former occasions, when the right honourable gentleman was so warm in the recommendation of a peace with France, whatever might be its government, that, apprehensive of an adherence to that etiquette, which might prevent us from being the first to make overtures, he advised us to make recourse to expedients, and sound the disposition of the enemy, through the medium of neutral powers. As soon as France adopted a

form of government, from which an expectation of stability was to be drawn, his Majesty's ministers readily waved all etiquette, and would not let such forms stand in the way of the permanent object of the peace and tranquillity of Europe, and they made direct proposals to the enemy. Had they, however, adopted the expedient proposed to them, and employed a neutral power to make their communications, was it to be expected that we should appoint that neutral power our minister plenipotentiary to manage our interests, as well as those of our allies? The gentleman through whom the communications were made at Basle, is one perfectly qualified from his talents, his zeal, and his integrity, to conduct any negociation; but whatever may be his character, it would be the height of imprudence, or rather folly, to entrust the management of a negociation of such uncommon moment to the discretion of an individual, and at such a distance.

The motives which induced his Majesty's ministers not to employ the same minister who had made the advances, as the negociator of a peace, are not confined to what I have hitherto stated; it was also necessary in order to shew our allies that we did not go beyond the line of that arrangement which was concerted with them, and that, true to our engagements, we had no separate object, and would not proceed a step without their concurrence. We wished to avoid any thing which could excite the slightest suspicion, that we were disposed to a separate negociation, which was what France would wish, and what was her uniform aim during the present contest. This was a policy which in some instances was too successful with some of our allies, and which enabled her to enforce on them successively more harsh and unequal conditions. It was with a view to the same open dealing, that it was thought proper to publish to the different courts of Europe the message and the answer, that the world might judge of the moderation of the allies, and the arrogance of the enemy.

There was one ground of sincerity which I believe the right honourable gentleman did not state; but which the di-

rectory rested upon, principally, in their answer. This was the proposal for holding a general congress. How this could support the charge of insincerity, I am at a loss to conceive. The British government pointed out the mode of pacification. This the enemy thought proper to decline and to reproach, but did not attempt to substitute any other mode by which the object was likely to be obtained. So far from projecting any thing which could even justly be an object of suspicion, ministers had preferred that of a congress, which was the only mode in which wars were concluded in all cases wherein allies were concerned, ever since the peace of Munster, the two last treaties only excepted. This charge of insincerity was represented by the right honourable gentleman as the probable cause of the exorbitant terms demanded by the enemy:—"They are high in their demands," says the right honourable gentleman, "because they know you are not in earnest; whereas, were they confident in your sincerity, they would be moderate and candid." In my humble apprehension, the extravagance of their terms leads to an opposite conclusion, and proves that the plea of insincerity is with them only a pretence. If they really thought his Majesty's ministers insincere, their policy would have been to make just and moderate demands, which, if rejected, would exhibit openly and in the face of the world, that want of candour, and that appetite for war, which the right honourable gentleman joins in so unjustly attributing to us. But having, in fact, no disposition for peace, and led away by false and aspiring notions of aggrandizement, the government of France offered us such terms as they knew could not possibly be complied with. Did they know the spirit, temper, and character of this country, when they presumed to make such arrogant proposals? These proposals I will leave to the silent sense impressed by them in the breast of every Englishman. I am, thank God! addressing myself to Britons, who are acquainted with the presumption of the enemy, and who, conscious of their resources, impelled by their native spirit, and valuing the national character, will prefer the chances and

alternatives of war to such unjust, unequal, and humiliating conditions.

The plea of the French directory, that their constitution did not permit them to accept of any terms, which should diminish the extent of country annexed by conquest to the territories of the republic, the right honourable gentleman himself very fairly condemns; because, if persevered in, it must be an eternal obstacle to the conclusion of any peace. That the interests of foreign nations should yield to those laws, which another country should think proper to prescribe to itself, is a fallacy, a monster in politics, that never before was heard of. Whether their military successes are likely to enable them to preserve a constitution so framed, I will not now inquire, but of this I am certain, that the fortune of war must be tried before the nations of Europe will submit to such pretences.

On a fair examination, however, will it appear, that the right honourable gentleman is right in observing, that this allegation could be no more than a pretext? If so, is it not singular that the right honourable gentleman, who seems so shocked at this pretext of the law of the French constitution, should direct none of his censure against the legislators, or government of that nation, but vent all his indignation on the British ministers, for deferring their proposals for peace, till the enemy had formed such a constitution as rendered peace impracticable? I will not now recount all those arguments which, on former occasions, I have so frequently submitted to the house, nor the motives which induced me to decline all proposals for peace, till some form of government was established, which had a chance of being stable and permanent. Surely, however, it is too great a task imposed upon me to be able to foresee, amongst the innumerable and varying constitutional projects of the French, the precise system on which they would fix at last. Much less could I foresee that they would have adopted a constitution which even the right honourable gentleman himself would be induced to condemn. But, having so condemned it, he should in justice have

transferred his censures to those by whom it was framed; instead of which, all the thunder of the right honourable gentleman's eloquence is spent at home upon the innocent, while the guilty at a distance are not disturbed even by the report.

However the spirit of this country may be roused, and its indignation excited, by the exorbitant conditions proposed to it by the enemy, yet even these extravagant pretensions should not induce us to act under the influence of passion. I could easily have anticipated that unanimity of sentiment, with which such degrading proposals have been rejected by every man in this country, but our resentment, or our scorn, must not for a moment suffer us to lose sight of our moderation and our temper. We have long been in the habit of waiting for the return of reason in our deluded enemy, and whenever they shall descend from those aspiring and inadmissible projects which they seem to have formed, and are proceeding to act upon, we shall still be ready to treat with them upon fair and honourable terms. We are particularly interested in urging them to the acceptance of such a constitution as may be best suited to their character and situation, but we must take care that their constitution shall not operate injuriously to ourselves. We do not shut the door against negociation whenever it can be fairly entered upon, but the enemy, so far from meeting us, say plainly they cannot listen to any terms, but such as in honour we cannot accept. The terms of peace which the right honourable gentleman pointed at, and which, after all, he considers as very disadvantageous, are, that the French may retain their conquests in Europe, and that we should keep our acquisitions in the colonies. What however is the proposal of the directory? No less than this: that every thing should be restored to them, and they in return are to give up nothing. It is also urged by the honourable gentleman, that we were to blame in so abruptly breaking off the negociation, and communicating the result to the world, together with the observations made upon it. To this I will answer, that the terms proposed by the enemy cut

short all further treaty; and as to the communication of the result, it will have, at least, the important consequence of dividing the opinions of France, and uniting those of England.

The motion was rejected;

Ayes..... 45
Noes.....207

October 6, 1796.

Debate on the address of thanks to his Majesty for his most gracious speech * on opening the session.

Mr. Pitt :——

Although I feel myself impelled, Sir, from more than one consideration, to come forward on the present occasion, I shall not be under the necessity of troubling the house much at length. It is certainly to me matter of great satisfaction, that

* " *My Lords and Gentlemen,*

" It is a peculiar satisfaction to me, in the present conjuncture of affairs, to recur to your advice, after the recent opportunity which has been given for collecting the sense of my people, engaged in a difficult and arduous contest, for the preservation of all that is most dear to us.

" I have omitted no endeavours for setting on foot negociations to restore peace to Europe, and to secure for the future the general tranquillity.—The steps which I have taken for this purpose have at length opened the way to an immediate and direct negociation, the issue of which must either produce the desirable end of a just, honourable, and solid peace for us, and for our allies, or must prove, beyond dispute, to what cause alone the prolongation of the calamities of war must be ascribed.

" I shall immediately send a person to Paris with full powers to treat for this object, and it is my anxious wish that this measure may lead to the restoration of general peace; but you must be sensible that nothing can so much contribute to give effect to this desire, as your manifesting that we possess both the determination and the resources to oppose, with increased activity and energy, the further efforts with which we may have to contend.

at so critical a conjuncture, indeed the most critical and the most important that has occurred during the present century, that on the only great and substantial question, on which the address proposes to express any opinion, there should be no

" You will feel this peculiarly necessary at a moment when the enemy has openly manifested the intention of attempting a descent on these kingdoms.—It cannot be doubted what would be the issue of such an enterprize; but it befits your wisdom to neglect no precautions that may either preclude the attempt or secure the speediest means of turning it to the confusion and ruin of the enemy.

" In reviewing the events of the year, you will have observed that, by the skill and exertions of my navy, our extensive and increasing commerce has been protected to a degree almost beyond example, and the fleets of the enemy have, for the greatest part of the year, been blocked up in their own ports.

" The operations in the East and West Indies have been highly honourable to the British arms, and productive of great national advantage; and the valour and good conduct of my forces, both by sea and land, have been eminently conspicuous.

" The fortune of war on the Continent has been more various, and the progress of the French armies threatened, at one period, the utmost danger to all Europe; but from the honourable and dignified perseverance of my ally the Emperor, and from the intrepidity, discipline, and invincible spirit of the Austrian forces, under the auspicious conduct of the Archduke Charles, such a turn has lately been given to the course of the war, as may inspire a well-grounded confidence that the final result of the campaign will prove more disastrous to the enemy than its commencement and progress for a time were favourable to their hopes.

" The apparently hostile dispositions and conduct of the court of Madrid have led to discussions, of which I am not yet enabled to acquaint you with the final result; but I am confident that whatever may be their issue, I shall have given to Europe a further proof of my moderation, and forbearance; and I can have no doubt of your determination to defend, against every aggression, the dignity, rights, and interests of the British empire.

" *Gentlemen of the House of Commons,*

" I rely on your zeal and public spirit for such supplies as you may think necessary for the service of the year. It is a great satisfaction to me to observe that, notwithstanding the temporary embarrassments which have been experienced, the state of the commerce, manufactures, and revenue

difference of sentiment in this house, and that even the right honourable gentleman* should have expressed his cordial concurrence. There are indeed many topics on which he touched in the course of his speech, in which I now differ with him as much as ever I differed at any former period; but, with respect to the great and substantial object of the address, the propriety of the conduct employed to bring about a solid and durable peace, such a peace as may be consistent with the permanent security and the just pretensions of the country, there does not subsist even the slightest shade of difference. That object is found to command the most full and most unequivocal support. Such a circumstance I must indeed consider as matter of just pride and of honest satisfaction. It exhibits the most decided and undeniable proof that the steps which his Majesty has taken towards negociation, that the clear and explicit declaration that he has made, are in themselves so unexceptionable, and so well calcu-

of the country, proves the real extent and solidity of our resources, and furnishes you such means as must be equal to any exertions which the present crisis may require.

"*My Lords and Gentlemen,*

"The distresses which were in the last year experienced from the scarcity of corn are now, by the blessing of God, happily removed, and an abundant harvest affords the pleasing prospect of relief in that important article to the labouring classes of the community.—Our internal tranquillity has also continued undisturbed:—the general attachment of my people to the British constitution has appeared on every occasion, and the endeavours of those who wished to introduce anarchy and confusion into this country, have been repressed by the energy and wisdom of the laws.

"To defeat all the designs of our enemies, to restore to my people the blessings of a secure and honourable peace, to maintain inviolate their religion, laws, and liberty, and to deliver down unimpaired to the latest posterity, the glory and happiness of these kingdoms, is the constant wish of my heart, and the uniform end of all my actions.—In every measure that can conduce to these objects, I am confident of receiving the firm, zealous, and affectionate support of my parliament."

* Mr. Fox.

lated for the end in view, that they must command assent from any man who retains the smallest care for the interest and honour of his country. Impressed with this feeling of satisfaction, I can have but little inclination to detain the house on points of slighter difference. I look with still higher satisfaction to the concurrence now expressed in the object of the address, as the pledge of general unanimity, and the omen of great exertions, if, unfortunately, that object should not be obtained.

The honourable gentleman justly states, that what hitherto has been done, only amounts to an overture for peace. It is impossible to state what may be the result. We cannot pronounce what will be the disposition of the enemy, or what circumstances may occur to influence the fate of negociation. We ought to look fairly to our situation. It holds out to us a chance of peace, if the enemy are disposed to accede to it on just and reasonable terms; but, on the other hand, if they are still actuated by ambitious projects, we shall gain another object by the course we have pursued; we shall unmask them in the eyes of Europe; we shall expose the injustice of their policy and their insatiable thirst of aggrandizement; and, if no other advantage be gained, we at least shall be able to put to the proof the sincerity of that pledge which this day has been given, that if the enemy are not disposed to accede to peace on just and reasonable terms, the war will be supported by the unanimous voice and the collected force of the nation. I trust and hope that it may not be necessary to have recourse to such a test of sincerity; but, while we indulge with satisfaction in the hope of a more favourable issue, we must at the same time look to the other alternative; we must be prepared with all the force of the country to support the prosecution of the contest, if its continuance should be found necessary. If the unanimity of this day be accompanied with such views, if it is not an unanimity founded merely upon the pleasing sound of peace, the captivating charm of renewed tranquillity, and the prospect of the termination of those scenes of horror and calamity with which

war is always attended (such an unanimity would indeed be fatal to the country), but if it is an unanimity the result of rational and manly reflection, founded upon a careful consideration of the situation of the country, and prepared to meet every conjuncture, it cannot then be too highly prized. We must not put out of view those means of exertion which we still possess; we must fairly compare the situation of this country with that of the enemy, and the amount of our own acquisitions with the losses of our allies; we must estimate the extent of the sacrifices which, under all these circumstances, it may be fitting for us to make, in order to effect the restoration of peace. It is with a view to these principles, that unanimity becomes so peculiarly desirable in the present moment. The clear and unequivocal explanation which his Majesty has given of his conduct, with respect to peace, has commanded a general concurrence. If it be that sentiment which, on the one hand, is prepared to support the just pretensions and reasonable hopes of the country, and on the other to resist the unjustifiable demands and arrogant claims of the enemy, I shall then consider the unanimity of this day as the happiest era in the history of the country. On this head I shall say no more, and agreeing thus far with the right honourable gentleman, I would wish to say as little as possible on the other points on which he touched in the course of his speech, and with respect to which we widely differ. They have been too often and too warmly discussed to be now forgotten by gentlemen who sat in the former parliament; and in the concluding part of his speech the right honourable gentleman gave us an assurance that we should hear of them again.

The right honourable gentleman has intimated as his opinion, that we must change the whole system of our interior policy, which he considers as inconsistent with the constitution of the country. I am happy, however, to find that he is so far satisfied with the constitution, as to ascribe to its protection that internal order and undisturbed tranquillity which he admitted that the country had for some time past enjoyed. He at the same time

reprobated in the severest terms laws which were passing during the last parliament, and which he represented as pregnant with the most mischievous consequences, and declared that he could not subscribe to any construction of that part of his Majesty's speech which included those among the laws, the energy and wisdom of which had contributed to secure the tranquillity of the country. Having made this declaration, it would be unfair and uncandid on my part not to be equally explicit. I desire no gentleman to vote for the address upon any such qualification with respect to those laws. I am firmly of opinion, that, exclusive of their influence, the peace of the country could not have been so successfully maintained, nor can I suffer the smallest reproach to fall upon the character of the last parliament, who displayed their wisdom and their energy in providing a remedy so suitable to the alarming nature of the crisis. If there is any ambiguity in the address, with respect to those laws, it is because they are so consistent with the spirit of the constitution which they were framed to protect, and so blended with the system of our jurisprudence, so congenial to the practice of former times, and so conformable even to the letter of former acts, that it was impossible to make any discrimination. It is to be recollected, that they were passed in a moment of alarm and turbulence; they had been found most admirably calculated to meet the emergency of the time. The address does not apportion with minute exactness what degree of tranquillity we have derived from the operation of those laws, when blended with the constitution, and what we might have enjoyed from the influence of laws previously subsisting; how much we were indebted for protection to the ancient strength of the edifice, or to those buttresses that were raised to support it in the moment of hurricane.

There were some other points on which the right honourable gentleman touched. He seemed to consider, from the language of the address, that endeavours have only been made of late to procure peace. He ought to recollect that his Majesty's speech particularly refers to what has taken place since he last commu-

nicated with his parliament. If ever the day shall come when an examination shall be instituted into the steps which have been adopted to secure the re-establishment of the general tranquillity, I am confident that no endeavours for that purpose will be found to have been wanting on the part of his Majesty's ministers. But gentlemen must be sensible, that what may be admitted as an endeavour to restore peace depends upon a variety of circumstances, and is likely to be differently appreciated by individuals of opposite sentiments. It depends on the relative state of parties, on the number of allies with whom we may be engaged to act, on the degree of attention we pay to their interests, and on the concert we wish to preserve with them. Taking all these necessary considerations into view, I again pledge myself that it will be found in the result of inquiry, that ministers have neglected no opportunity which could have been improved for the purpose of accelerating peace.

But the right honourable gentleman has told us, that we are at last come to the period which he had all along pointed out; that we have now consented to adopt that course which he has uniformly recommended since the commencement of the contest—to send a person to Paris, and to try the effect of negociation. He takes to himself all the merit of that policy which we have tardily adopted, and so confident did he feel himself in this ground of self-exultation, that he declined all illustration of his victory, and merely made it the subject of one triumphant observation. His assertion was, "you are now taking those measures which, if you had listened to my councils, you might have adopted four years ago." But does it follow that the measure was right then, because it is right now? May not a period of four years produce many events to justify a material change of policy, and to render measures wise and expedient, which at a certain time would neither have been prudent nor seasonable? Because you do not chuse to make peace the day after an unprovoked aggression, you may not be justified in holding out pacific overtures after a lapse of four years? The argument of the right ho-

nourable gentleman amounts to this, that either you must make peace the day after the aggression, or not make it at all.

With respect to the relative situation of this country and Spain, it would not be consistent with my duty to go into any detail on that subject at the present moment.

As to the question of our resources, the right honourable gentleman admits them to be extensive and flourishing. They furnish, indeed, in a moment like the present, a subject of peculiar congratulation and well-grounded confidence. If the revenue after a four years war, which might have been expected to have injured it so materially in so many branches, and after all the additional burthens which have been imposed, still keeps up to the rate at which it was stated last year, that circumstance is surely no slight source of satisfaction. With respect to the state of commerce, I am enabled to speak in a very different strain. Notwithstanding all the embarrassments which it has had to encounter, it has attained and still continues to enjoy a pitch of unexampled prosperity. Those embarrassments have proceeded from various causes;—the expense of the war abroad, and the high price of articles of consumption at home; the situation of part of the Continent, where the markets have been shut against us; and even the growth of our capital re-acting upon the commerce which occasioned it, so that what was an unequivocal symptom of prosperity, was itself a cause of temporary distress. Of the continuance of this prosperity, we have now the best assurance. The state of our exports during the last six months has been equal to what they were in the most flourishing year of peace, 1792; and our foreign trade has even exceeded the produce of that year, which was the most productive of any in the history of this country. Under these circumstances, whatever temporary embarrassments may have arisen from the quantity of specie sent out of the country, from the want of a sufficient circulating medium, from the state of foreign markets, and from the increase of our capital; and however these difficulties may for a time have obstructed the ordinary operations of fi-

nance, the commercial character of the country has lost neither its vigour nor importance. If such has been the state of things, at a period when the country has had to contend for every thing dear to it; if, notwithstanding all the obstacles which have clogged the machinery, the spring has retained so much force and energy, we may presume, that, if by the obstinacy and ambition of the enemy we should be called to still greater exertions, our resources as yet remain untouched, and that we shall be able to bring them into action with a degree of concert and effect worthy of the character of the British nation, and of the cause in which they will be employed. These resources have in them nothing hollow or delusive. They are the result of an accumulated capital, of gradually increasing commerce, of high and established credit. They are the fruits of fair exertion, of laudable ingenuity, of successful industry; they have been produced under a system of order and of justice, while we, under many disadvantages, have been contending against a country which exhibits in every respect the reverse of the picture;—a proof that the regular operation of those principles must triumph over the unnatural and exhausting efforts of violence and extortion. By these resources we are now qualified to take such steps as may tend to conduct us to a solid and a durable peace; or, if we do not succeed in that object, to prosecute the contest with firmness and confidence.

The right honourable gentleman suggested one remark, that the speech contained no recognition of the government of France. He wasted a good deal of ingenuity in attempting to prove that it ought to have contained an express acknowledgment of the French government. It ought to have occurred to him that a passport having been sent for and granted, some communication must have taken place on that occasion, and as the executive directory had been satisfied with the form of communication, and the mode in which they had been addressed, it could not be necessary for him to start a difficulty where they had found none. I can assure him, on the part of British ministers, that no question of etiquette, no difficulty of form originating from them,

shall be permitted to stand in the way of negociation, or to obstruct the attainment of the great object of peace.

As to the other points, the right honourable gentleman has suggested what lessons we ought to derive from the experience of adversity. These lessons may be greatly varied according to the situation of parties and the different points of view in which the subject is considered. But, when the right honourable gentleman tells us that the situation of this country is that of adversity, I can by no means agree to the proposition. How far it deserves to be ranked under that description, let those pronounce who are best acquainted with the state of our resources. It cannot surely be termed a state of adversity from any losses of our trade, the diminution of our capital, or from the reduction of any of our foreign possessions. We have not been greatly impoverished by the events of the war in the East and West Indies. We cannot be much weakened in our national strength, even upon the statement of the right honourable gentleman, by having our navy, in consequence of repeated triumphs over every hostile squadron, raised to a greater degree of glory and of fame than it had ever before attained. Where then are we to look for the symptoms of this adversity? Are we to look for them in the losses and disasters of our allies? But, does the right honourable gentleman appeal to these as a criterion of adversity, when in the same breath I hear him hold out as a source of complaint, that you are not, under your present circumstances, sure of a triumphant peace? And why can you not command such a peace?—because you will not separate your own greatness, and your own commerce, from the interest and from the fate of your allies; because you refuse to purchase peace for yourselves on any other terms than those which will secure the tranquillity of Europe, and consider the situation of Great Britain as chained to that of the Continent, by the bonds of a liberal and comprehensive policy. If what has been lost on the Continent is a subject of regret, it is at least a topic on which we have no reason to reproach ourselves. If even the prospect in that quarter continued as gloomy as it was some time since, and if

the extremity had not roused the armies of the emperor to those gallant and spirited exertions which have been crowned with such brilliant and unprecedented success, no share of blame could attach to us. While the violence of France has been over-running so great a part of Europe, and every where carrying desolation in its progress, your naval exertions have enabled you to counterbalance their successes, by acquisitions in different parts of the globe, and to pave the way for the restoration of peace to your allies, on terms which their own strength might have been unable to procure. If you look indeed to the geographical situation of the seat of war, the emperor has not regained by his recent victories all that he had formerly lost. But do you count for nothing the destruction and ruin of those armies, by whom all the previous successes of the enemy had been achieved? Do you count for nothing the glorious and immortal testimony that has been exhibited to mankind, that disciplined valour must finally triumph over those principles that the war was undertaken to oppose, and which owed all their extraordinary and unaccountable successes to the violence in which they originated, and the excesses with which they were accompanied? A memorable warning has also been afforded with respect to the true consequences which have resulted to those foreign powers, who, in opposition to their true interest, have courted the alliance of that enemy, and expected to find security in disgraceful tranquillity. Recent events have served also to exculpate the characters of those who were calumniated as desirous to embrace their principles, and receive their laws, and in Germany they have left behind them nothing but the memory of their wrongs, and a feeling of eternal resentment. Are such effects to be considered as of small importance, or to be put in competition with the reduction of a fortress, or the possession of a district?

Of the virtues to be acquired in the school of adversity, the right honourable gentleman only mentioned those of moderation and forbearance. Moderation I should consider as that virtue which is best adapted to the dawn of prosperity: there are other

virtues of no less importance which are to be acquired under a reverse of fortune, and which are equally becoming in those who are called to suffer:—there are the virtues of adversity endured and adversity resisted; of adversity encountered and adversity surmounted. The recent example of Germany has furnished an illustrious instance of fortitude and perseverance, and their fortitude and perseverance have had their merited reward. These are lessons which I trust this country has not to learn. England has never shewn itself deficient in firmness and magnanimity; it is unrivalled in resource; it has always been foremost in the career of honourable exertion, and it has only to maintain its accustomed vigour and perseverance, to effect the restoration of general tranquillity upon terms consistent with the dignity of its own character, and the security and interest of Europe.

The question upon the address was carried without a division.

October 18, 1796.

The House having resolved itself into a committee to consider of that part of his Majesty's speech, which respected invasion, and the paragraph being read as follows,

"You will feel this peculiarly necessary at a moment when the enemy has openly manifested the intention of attempting a descent on these kingdoms. It cannot be doubted what would be the issue of such an enterprize; but it befits your wisdom to neglect no precautions that may either preclude the attempt, or secure the speediest means of turning it to the confusion and ruin of the enemy;"—

Mr. Pitt rose:

After the unanimous vote which the house gave upon the first day of the session, and their general concurrence in that part of the address which respects a foreign invasion, it would be doing injustice to the feelings which were then expressed, were I to make any apology for calling their attention to the sub-

ject on the present occasion. I shall not detain them therefore a single moment in shewing the propriety of laying before them at so early a period the measure which I mean this day to propose. It is equally our duty and our interest by every means in our power, and by every exertion of which we are capable, if possible, in the language of the address, to preclude the attempt, and at the same time to take such measures of defence as shall cause the invasion, if it should be attempted, to issue in the confusion and ruin of the enemy. I shall not at present go much at large into the detail of preparations, but merely suggest a general outline of defence, which, if it should be approved of by the committee, may be particularly discussed when the bills are afterwards brought in upon the resolutions. The general considerations are few and obvious. The natural defence of this kingdom, in case of invasion, is certainly its naval force. This presents a formidable barrier, in whatever point the enemy may direct their attack. In this department, however, little now remains to be done, our fleet at this moment being more respectable and more formidable than ever it was at any other period in the history of the country. But strong and powerful even as it at present is, it is capable of considerable increase, could an additional supply of seamen, or even landsmen, who in a very short time might be trained to an adequate knowledge of the naval service, be procured. For this purpose I would suggest a levy upon the different parishes throughout the kingdom—an expedient precisely similar to that which was practised with so much success nearly two years ago. This levy, however, I would not confine as a mode of supply for the sea service. It is certainly of the highest importance both for the internal defence of the country and the security of our foreign possessions, that all the old regiments should be complete. But every one must be sensible, that from the numbers in those regiments who have fallen a sacrifice to sickness and the fortune of war, a more expeditious method must be adopted for their completion, than the ordinary mode of recruiting supplies, in order that the country may be able to avail

itself of this arm of strength. I would propose, therefore, in the first place, a levy of fifteen thousand men from the different parishes for the sea service, and for recruiting the regiments of the line. The committee, however, must be sensible when a plan of invasion is in agitation—a scheme, which almost at another time would not have been conceived, and an attempt, which, by any other enemy than that with whom we have now to contend, might have been justly deemed impracticable—that a more enlarged and a more expensive plan of prevention and of defence is necessary.

In digesting this plan there are two considerations of which we ought not to lose sight. The first is the means (which must not be altogether new) of calling together a land force, sufficiently strong to frustrate the attempt, keeping our naval force entirely out of view; and secondly, to adopt such measures in raising this force as shall not materially interfere with the industry, the agriculture and the commerce of the country. It will be for the house to decide upon the degree to which the former consideration ought to be permitted to interfere with the latter. A primary object will be to raise, and gradually to train, such a force as may in a short time be fit for service. Of all the modes of attaining this object, there is none so expeditious, so effectual, and attended with so little expense, as that of raising a supplemental levy of militia, to be grafted upon the present establishment. I should propose that this supplement shall consist of sixty thousand men, not to be immediately called out, but to be enrolled, officered, and gradually trained, so as to be fit for service at a time of danger. The best mode of training them without withdrawing too many at one time from their regular pursuits, will be to embody one-sixth part in regular succession, each to be trained for twenty days, in the course of which they may become tolerable proficients in the military exercise. With respect to the mode of conducting the levy, the returns that have been lately made from the different counties shew the present levies to be extremely disproportioned, and that the clause in the act which

provides against this abuse has never been executed. Accordingly we find that in some counties the proportion is one out of seven, and in others one out of three. It will be expedient therefore to regulate the future levy, not by the proportions now existing, but by a general estimate of the inhabitants who are able to bear arms.

The next consideration which merits attention is the manner in which the troops are to be furnished, which I think ought to be generally from all parts of the kingdom, and that an obligation be imposed upon those who are balloted, either to serve in person or to provide a substitute; and the better to preserve the general proportion, that this substitute be provided either from the parish in which the person balloted resides, or from a parish immediately adjoining. It will be proper also to remove the present exemption from those who have more than one child, on the express condition that they shall not be called upon to serve out of the parish in which they live. The mode of training only one-sixth part of the whole, twenty days in succession, as it will only withdraw ten thousand at a time from their usual occupations, consequently will not much infringe upon the general order of the community. Of course they must be provided with some sort of uniform, but it will be of the coarsest kind, and such as may be purchased at a small expense. A sufficient number of arms will also be in readiness for supplying each man in the moment of danger.

Another measure which I would suggest to the committee is to provide a considerable force of irregular cavalry. The regular cavalry on the present establishment is certainly by no means inconsiderable, and the yeomanry cavalry, which from their numbers are sufficiently respectable, we have found to be highly useful in securing the quiet and maintaining the internal tranquillity of the country. But with a view to repelling an invasion, the more that this species of force is extended the greater advantage is likely to accrue from it, as an invading enemy, who must be destitute of horses, can have no means to meet

it upon equal terms. Besides, it is a species of force which may be provided in a mode that will be attended with almost no expense to the public, and with little hardship to individuals. In order to calculate the extent to which these irregular cavalry may be raised, it is necessary to estimate the number of horses which are kept for pleasure throughout the kingdom, and by raising the levy in this proportion we shall have the satisfaction to think that it will fall upon those only who have a considerable stake to defend. By the produce of the tax, which is as good a criterion as any of the number of horses kept for pleasure, we find that, in Scotland, England, and Wales, they amount to about two hundred thousand, one hundred and twenty thousand of which belong to persons who keep only one horse of the kind, the rest to persons, some of whom keep ten and various other proportions. It certainly would not be a very severe regulation when compared with the object meant to be accomplished, to require one tenth of these horses for the public service. I would therefore propose that every person who keeps ten horses, shall be obliged to furnish one horse and a horseman to serve in a corps of cavalry;—that every person who keeps more than ten horses, and a number falling short of twenty, after furnishing a horse and horseman, for the first ten, shall subscribe a proportionate sum for the rest, which shall be applied to defray the general expense;—that those who keep twenty shall furnish two, three of thirty, &c. and that those who keep fewer than ten shall form themselves into a class, when it shall be decided by ballot who, at the common expense, shall furnish the horse and the horseman. These troops thus raised will be provided with uniform and accoutrements, formed into corps, and put under proper officers. And surely when the means are compared with the object to be attained and the expense to which individuals will be subjected, with the security of the property which they possess, no one will complain that that end or that security is purchased at too dear a price.

There is still another source which, though it may not appear so serious as those which have been already mentioned, ought not to be neglected. Upon the supposition of an invasion, it would certainly be of no small importance to form bodies of men, who, from their dexterity in using fire-arms, might be highly useful in harassing the operations of the enemy. The employment of such men for the purpose of defending the country and harassing the enemy, in case of an invasion, must be attended with the most serious and important consequences. Gentlemen will naturally guess that I am now alluding to that description of men called gamekeepers, and to others of the same class. I do most certainly allude to them, for there are many whose personal services would be of the utmost advantage. But I also, and more particularly, allude to those instances where gentlemen are gamekeepers for their own amusement, where they are gamekeepers merely for the satisfaction of being so, not gamekeepers of necessity but of choice; in such cases, there can be no hardship in obliging those gentlemen, if we cannot have their personal services, at least to find a substitute, who may be as well calculated to defend the country as themselves. I do therefore propose, that those persons who shall have taken out licences to shoot game, or deputations for gamekeepers, shall, within a certain period, be at liberty to return the same if they think proper; but if, after that period, they shall continue their licences or deputations for gamekeepers, then they shall be obliged to find substitutes. I observe gentlemen smiling at the idea of raising a force by such means, but that smile will be converted into surprise, when they hear that the number of persons who have taken out those licences are no fewer than 7000. Such a plan cannot be considered as a means of internal defence likely to be approved of by every person in the country.

I have stated to the committee the general outline of the bill. I shall defer saying much more on the subject: it will be more satisfactory to speak particularly when the resolution is

reported to the house, than to enter into any further detail at this moment. The number of cavalry which I propose to raise in the manner I have mentioned will be 20,000; but with respect to whether there must not be some other additional mode adopted, it is impossible to say exactly, from not being able to ascertain with certainty how many persons it may be necessary to exempt, on account of their being in orders, or for other reasons. Thus have I pointed out the means by which I propose to raise 15,000 men, to be divided between the sea and the land service, to raise the supplemental levy of 60,000 for the militia, of which one-sixth part is to be forthwith called out to exercise; to raise 20,000 men by means of persons taking out the licences to shoot game and keep gamekeepers, or on such other persons as may hereafter be deemed necessary. If the propositions I have mentioned should be approved, I should wish the resolutions to be printed, and if immediately, to introduce the bill, to carry it on to a committee, and to fill up the blanks, and then to allow an interval of a week for its discussion. I mention this in order that more time should not be taken up than is absolutely necessary for the due examination of the principles of the bill; since, gentlemen, you cannot but recollect, when you are once satisfied, and have determined upon the propriety of any particular measure, every day, every hour of delay, is attended with additional danger.

I shall now move that the chairman be directed to report to the house, "That it is the opinion of the committee, that a bill should be brought in for raising a certain number of men in the several counties of England, and the several counties, burghs, and stewartries of Scotland, for the service of his Majesty."

A discussion of some length succeeded, in which Mr. Sheridan, Mr. Dundas, and Mr. Fox, severally delivered their sentiments upon the proposed measure.

Mr. Pitt spoke in reply:

After what has already been said by my right honourable friend*, I entertain some doubts whether I ought to detain the committee one moment from the unanimous vote which I believe will be given upon the present occasion. I am sure, at least, that it will not be necessary to consume much of your time by replying at length to the short observations of the honourable gentleman †, or to the more detailed remarks in which he has been followed by the right honourable gentleman ‡, upon the same side, as I cannot but regard the declaration with which they prefaced and concluded their animadversions, that they did not mean to oppose the resolutions which I had the honour to propose, as a sufficient answer to the arguments by which it was accompanied. If the right honourable gentleman feels that the delarations of ministers, upon the subject which constitutes the foundation of their present deliberations, are not sufficient to justify the measures which are to be grounded upon it; if he considers their assurances or their representations entitled to no confidence; if he is persuaded that there exists no danger of invasion, against which it is intended to provide; if he is convinced that the objects of the preparations that are to be made are destined to carry on other warlike operations than the plan avows, or are employed as pretexts to cover designs of ambition or of encroachment at home; if he believes that they are intended to prosecute that object of the war which he thinks proper to describe as unjust and diabolical, I would ask, how can he reconcile these principles with the conduct he is to pursue; or, as a public man, upon what public ground he can rest that assent which he has bestowed upon the measures which have been suggested? But while the right honourable gentleman indulged in these animadversions, he knew well that the precautions were demanded by the country as measures of self-defence, from which he could not withhold his concurrence. He demonstrated, by his actions, that he was in reality sensible that the present was not like other wars, undertaken to

* Mr. Dundas. † Mr. Sheridan. ‡ Mr. Fox.

maintain a point of national honour, or to defend a disputed interest;—to support an ally that was attacked, or to guard remote or doubtful dangers; but that it was the first war in which a great and free people, in the prosecution of their commerce and the enjoyment of their prosperity, were called upon for a time to defend the sources from which they flowed, and, in compliance with the good faith which was due to their allies, and urged by a sense of common danger, found themselves compelled to oppose unprovoked aggression, and resist principles hostile to the government and constitution of these kingdoms, and to every regular government in Europe. Why did not the right honourable gentleman follow up his principles, by opposing, likewise, the measures which were proposed to meet this danger, but because he believed that the situation of affairs is such as to require these precautions; and because he must know that a false security could alone present the smallest chance of success in the attempt which has been threatened; because, also, he knew that such was the character of the enemy with whom we had to contend, that they were not so liable to be deterred by the desperate nature of the enterprise, or by a consideration of the number of persons whom its ruin might devote to destruction? Such, I am convinced, were the feelings of the right honourable gentleman upon this occasion, and such are the considerations by which his conduct is explained, although, perhaps, he found it necessary to colour his assent, and to disguise his conviction, by the invectives he introduced against the last parliament, and against the conduct of administration. Though, however, he reprobated the system and the measures of administration, though he accused the justice and vilified the character of the former parliament, he could not trust the natural conclusion of his own premises. He did not ask if any of the new members, who had so lately come up impregnated with the sense of their electors, or if the old members, who were witnesses of the proceedings, and whose recollection of the last parliament was so recent,

would agree with him in the character which he had ascribed to it. Nor did he venture to make any appeal to ascertain who were those who would concur with him in asserting the principles he had professed. While I reflect upon these circumstances, I feel confident that it will not be incumbent upon me to answer at much length the arguments of the honourable gentlemen on the other side of the house, especially when the objections of the one are answered by the observations adduced by the other.

While the right honourable gentlemen* professed to agree with every sentiment of his honourable friend†, they materially overthrew each other's reasonings, and every sentence uttered by the right honourable gentleman was confuted by that which preceded it. The internal order of battle seems to have been completely deranged, and the arguments of the honourable gentlemen themselves meet in hostile encounter. The honourable gentleman† wished to impose upon ministers a responsibility for the measures which were founded upon the assertion in his Majesty's speech, because, continued he, this matter rests only upon the information of the speech from the throne, which I must consider as the speech of ministers; and in order to supply the defect of this responsibility which attaches to ministers by the most solemn and formal declaration, the honourable gentleman insists upon receiving satisfaction, and imposing responsibility by a communication less formal and less authentic! The right honourable gentleman*, however, proceeded as if ministers were pleading on their responsibilty, and then concluded by maintaining that there is no responsibility at all.

The right honourable gentleman is likewise offended with the general argument of the necessity of precaution, which was employed by my right honourable friend‡; but his honourable friend† beside him admits, that only general information was to be expected; so that to this argument the right honourable gentleman must lift up his hand and express his disapprobation, as he

* Mr. Fox. † Mr. Sheridan. ‡ Mr. Dundas.

professes that he cannot act upon general information. But why, says he, did not the danger, which you now apprehend, long before this induce you to demand the adoption of those measures of precaution which you now think it necessary to employ? No such plans, continued he, were pursued upon any former period. The right honourable gentleman too went out of his way to find comparisons to depreciate the characters of ministers, and asserted, that to such measures as the present much better ministers, in former wars, never had found it necessary to resort. He does not, however, mention, who these much better ministers are; and if the right honourable gentleman recollects the language he employed during the seven last years of the American war, there was a time when he bestowed upon the conduct of that administration epithets as offensive as *unjust* and *diabolical*. Why, exclaims the honourable gentleman, did you not call for these measures upon former occasions? Are we, then, gravely deliberating upon a great and important subject, and are we to be told that, in certain given circumstances, no precautions are to be taken, because, at a former period, such measures were not required? May not the means which were judged adequate in a particular situation, be found insufficient when circumstances alter, or when danger is increased? The honourable gentlemen, though in other points their arguments were at variance, go on together contending that my right honourable friend had said, on a former occasion, that the force which this country possessed was sufficient to repel the attacks of all Europe. Certainly I do not believe that my right honourable friend ever asserted, that in any possible case the volunteer corps would be sufficient for the defence of the country. If my right honourable friend had asserted that the spirit by which these volunteer associations were dictated, put in action as circumstances required, and accommodated to the pressure of danger, would be able to resist the efforts of the whole house of Bourbon, or of the republic of France, aided by any particular branch of the house of Bourbon, or of any other combination of powers—such an opinion I believe to be just,

and at least, perfectly consonant to the well-known firmness and zeal of my right honourable friend. But may not the relative situation of the enemy present them with more specific means of carrying their purpose into execution, than they possessed at a former period, when it was necessary to guard against the dangers which then threatened them from various quarters?

The right honourable gentleman says, you relied on the firmness and attachment of the people two years ago; and is it less now that you have recourse to extraordinary precautions? The attachment and loyalty of the people of this country, I trust, has experienced no diminution. It lives, and is cherished by that constitution which, notwithstanding the assertions of the right honourable gentleman, still remains entire. Under the protection and support which it derives from the acts passed by the last parliament, the constitution inspires the steady affection of the people, and is still felt to be worth defending with every drop of our blood. The voice of the country proclaims that it continues to deserve and to receive their support. Fortified by laws in perfect unison with its principles and with its practice, and fitted to the emergencies by which they were occasioned, it still possesses that just esteem and admiration of the people which will induce them faithfully to defend it against the designs of domestic foes, and the attempts of their foreign enemies. The right honourable gentleman discovers the extent of the adversity into which he represents the country to be fallen in some of the measures now proposed for its defence, and which he reprobates by the name of *requisitions*;—a species of levy, however, which so long as it was practised in France, he did not consider as deserving of any particular disapprobation. I will not at this moment inquire, whether requisitions in France were a right and proper measure; but let not the right honourable gentleman at once maintain that the attachment of the people renders these measures of defence superfluous, and in the next moment represent these precautions as proofs of the intolerable pitch of adversity to which the nation is reduced. The situation in which we

are placed does not imply a suspicion of our power, though it justifies our precautions. That prosperity is deceitful and dangerous, if it lead to a false security; that the danger, though groundlessly apprehended, or falsely exaggerated, without exertion upon our part, can alone be of doubtful issue or perilous consequence, is the real opinion which the contemplation of the state of the county is fitted to inspire.

The right honourable gentleman, when he expressed his dislike of the mode of pressing men for the public service, did not specifically apply his objection to the plan of augmenting the militia and raising the new supplies of cavalry; he admits that these may, in some measure, come under the description of personal force. The mode proposed of increasing the militia is not new in its principle. They are to be balloted in the same manner as the established militia of the country. The 60,000 men which it was proposed to add, were to be formed precisely as the 90,000 of which the ordinary number consists. The present addition does not exceed the amount for which, on former occasions, it was thought necessary to provide. In 1756, a bill passed for doubling the number. The right honourable gentleman, however, in pressing his argument, runs before his recollection. The 15,000 men for the land and sea service are to be raised according to the provisions of the act passed two years ago upon this subject. Does the right honourable gentleman then consider this to be pressing? No; it is meant to raise volunteers by contribution among the inhabitants of each parish, and, if they failed to produce the number at which they were rated, they were to pay a certain sum over the sum at which a person to serve could be procured. If the right honourable gentleman reprobates this mode as pressing, what was the language he held upon another occasion, and when a different mode was pursued? In 1794, when voluntary offers of service were introduced for the defence of the country, this mode was reprobated as repugnant to the constitution; and now when men are called upon to contribute their property and their personal service to the defence

of their country, it is discovered to be unjust, and stigmatized as requisition! The two honourable gentlemen admit the necessity of precaution, and they reprobate every measure which is proposed; and while they agree that it is necessary to provide for the defence of the state, they are dissatisfied with the means by which security is to be obtained. Notwithstanding the unanimity with which the resolution will be voted, I cannot augur well for the future co-operation which the measures may obtain, when I consider the sentiments which the honourable gentlemen entertain, and the observations with which their present concurrence is accompanied.

The resolution was afterwards put and agreed to.

December 8, 1796.

The report of the committee of Ways and Means was brought up, and the resolutions were read a first time. On the motion for their being now read a second time,

Mr. Fox, in very animated language, urged the attention of the House to the circumstance of ministers having granted £1,200,000, to the Emperor of Germany without the consent of parliament, upon which he dwelt for a considerable time.

Mr. Pitt replied to his observations:

Those who never before had an opportunity of hearing the speeches which the right honourable gentleman has been accustomed to pronounce, and of observing the line of argument which he has been accustomed to employ upon every public question which has been agitated in this house, would certainly have supposed, upon the present occasion, that this day, for the first time in his life, the right honourable gentleman had felt real alarm for the liberties and constitution of his country, and for the first time a point had occurred, so intimately connected with the preservation of their political rights, that in the event of a decision hostile to the opinion which he holds, it is to be vindi-

cated by nothing less than an appeal to the people. But it has happened to those who have often had occasion to attend to the right honourable gentleman, to have heard the same danger represented, and the same consequences applied. It is not once twice, or three times that the right honourable gentleman has reprobated with the same emphasis, stigmatised with the same epithets, and denounced as pregnant with ruin to the liberties of the country, measures, which it has been thought necessary to bring forward, and which the wisdom of parliament has thought proper to adopt; nor is it now the first time that the right honourable gentleman, and those who sit near him, have made a stand behind the last dike of the constitution. It is not the first, the second, nor the third time, I repeat, that upon points which a great majority of the house and of the country deemed to be connected with the preservation of their dearest interests, the right honourable gentleman has raised the cry of alarm, and has affected to see the downfal of the constitution, and the destruction of our liberties. Not many months even have elapsed since the right honourable gentleman stated with the same confidence, and urged with the same fervour, that the liberties of England were annihilated, and its constitution gone, if certain bills then pending passed into law; laws under which, I will venture to affirm, that a vast majority of the people of this country agree that the substantial blessings of their free government have been preserved, and the designs of our real enemies have hitherto been frustrated. Nay, not many hours have elapsed since the right honourable gentleman gave a two month's notice of his intention to move the repeal of those acts which he once represented as a grievance under which he could not sleep.

There is, indeed, something striking, something peculiarly singular, in the manner in which the new constitutional light has broken in upon the right honourable gentleman. This declaration of mind, which has infused so deadly an alarm into the mind of the right honourable gentleman, this declaration by which the constitution is annihilated, was made yesterday! This declaration is admitted to have been made in a way the

most clear and distinct, indeed so clear as to magnify the danger, and to aggravate the offence. This declaration, which he now feels to be so fatal to the liberties of the country, so repugnant to the principles of the constitution, as to render it incumbent upon him to make it the ground of an extraordinary proceeding, and the reason of signal animadversion against me, did not yesterday strike him as of so much importance as immediately to call him up! It did not inspire with any particular sensation his honourable friend near him*, a gentleman by nature not free from jealousy, and of a vigilance which it is not easy to elude—it had not drawn from him the smallest remark of any kind, that could expose the danger with which it was pregnant. It never disturbed the serenity of his temper, though perhaps not the least liable to irritation, nor had it prevented him from laying before the house the details of his various calculations with the most calm and placid equanimity, the very moment after he had witnessed the death-wound of the constitution! After an interval of debate, it had deranged none of the calculations of the right honourable gentleman, it had not driven out of his head his reasonings of the three per cents. his remarks upon the navy debt, nor a single circumstance of objection which the survey of the subject had presented, nor had it deterred him from allowing the resolutions to be carried with an unanimous vote. But after the right honourable gentleman had slept upon this subject, he discovers that the speech which he yesterday heard with so much indifference, contains principles of such dreadful tendency, and threatens consequences of such fatal operation, as to lead him not merely to propose a censure of the doctrines, or the reprobation of the particular measure; not merely the punishment of the person by whom it was uttered; but which would induce him in the first instance to take revenge for the error or the guilt of a minister, by giving his negative to the whole resolutions, which have no relation to the particular measure in question; which would prompt him to suspend those supplies which

* Mr. Grey.

are calculated to give confidence to the negociations for peace, or in case of being reduced to that alternative, energy to the operations of war; that would induce him to tell the enemy by the very next post, by which the unanimous determination of parliament to provide for every situation is conveyed, that the house of commons had interfered to stop the effect of their former decision, had suspended the means that were to add weight to the exertions of the executive government, and at so critical a moment of the negociation had committed the interests of this country and her allies, and flattered the hopes and raised the pretensions of the enemy. Such is the length to which the proposition of the right honourable gentleman goes. It is not to remedy the imputed crime which has been committed, nor to guard against the chance of its occurring in future, but it is calculated to derange every measure which may be in train, and to disappoint every design that may be in contemplation. I cannot, however, but hope, that when the right honourable gentleman has viewed the subject with more consideration, when he has again slept upon his wrath, he will recur to that coolness which he first experienced, and that his vehemence and his alarm will subside. But whether the right honourable gentleman is to be deterred by the prospect of the dangers which must arise from the measure which he proposes, at least I cannot doubt that consideration will have its just weight with the house.

The right honourable gentleman says, that if he succeeds in his present motion, he will move the house against his Majesty's ministers for the part they have acted upon this occasion. There is one thing that I will intreat of the right honourable gentleman, and he may be assured it is the only supplication that I will address to him upon this subject, and it is, that if he can prove to the house that I have violated the constitution, and committed the crime of which he accuses me, he will not defer a single moment to take the step which he has threatened; that he will confine his efforts to that object, and that he will not combine with the vengeance he pursues, a measure that involves the ruin of his country. Let the punishment destined for mi-

nisters light upon them alone, and let the consequences of the measures which they employed to avert the dangers which threatened their country, the measures which they adopted for its safety, for the salvation of Europe, rest upon themselves. This much I address to the right honourable gentleman, not for personal considerations, nor do I intreat the boon as a matter of personal indulgence. If it be refused by him, I hope at least that the house will be actuated by more moderate feelings, and guided by wiser maxims.

The rest of the right honourable gentleman's propositions, and the point of his observations, are so exclusively confined to myself, that I am at a loss in what way to proceed, or whether I ought to trespass upon the house with any remarks upon them, since the subject is intended for a more full discussion. I cannot, however, refrain from exposing the strange and extraordinary misrepresentations which he has given of the general question upon which he builds the conclusion of criminality; and I cannot doubt, that when the house perceives the foundation upon which the accusation is raised, they will be able to judge of the effect that ought to be given to the others with which it was vested in the house of commons. The right honourable gentleman stated the general principle which constituted the chief security of our liberties—the power of controlling the public expenditure—and I hope there is little difference of opinion upon this subject. The right honourable gentleman says, that if there is one thing sure in the constitution, it is this; and if it be violated, he maintains that the people still possess the means of obtaining redress. After the representations which the house have heard upon the dilapidations which the constitution has suffered, and the invasions committed upon the public liberties, they may judge of the reality of the danger which is now threatened, when it is even yet admitted that resources are left by which it may be opposed. Although the general principle which the right honourable gentleman states as the essence of the freedom of the constitution be admitted, it cannot be disputed that it is subject to limitation. At every period since the

commencement of those periods to which we refer for the pure practice of the constitution, in the best and most glorious æras in the history of our government, the principle of extraordinaries has been received, not merely for individual expenses, but recognised upon general views. It has prevailed under every administration, even those with which the right honourable gentleman was connected, during the three last reigns, and in the most approved periods of liberty and constitutional policy. The right honourable gentleman then holds this principle without exception, while the practice of every government proves that it has been always limited, and his whole argument is applicable to all the extraordinaries that ever were voted by parliament. It is impossible, therefore, that the right honourable gentleman could have correctly stated—I can hardly believe that he has sincerely stated—this argument, which his experience must disavow, and his knowledge must inform him is neither consistent with the principles of the constitution, nor with its practice at periods which deserve to be followed as examples.

But though I am here arguing upon general points, the question in reality comes within a narrower compass. The right honourable gentleman chuses to overlook in one instance what he alludes to in another part of his speech. Did it never occur to him that parliament had sometimes committed to his Majesty, not new, but special powers, which superseded all general questions? In reality this discretionary power is expressly committed to his Majesty. Before I sit down, I intend to move that his Majesty's message of the 8th of December last year should be read, and likewise the act, granting a vote of credit. From this it will appear that a power was given to his Majesty to apply the sum contained in the vote of credit as the exigencies of the state might require. Suppose the case, which will not be a less suitable illustration, because it approaches the fact, that powers had been conferred to give that assistance to the allies of this country, which our own interest and the circumstances of the situation required; can any man doubt that the minister, who should have hesitated to issue that sum, which,

granted, might have enabled our allies to maintain their own cause, and to defend the safety of Europe, and who should have allowed the enemies of Austria to complete her destruction by withholding a seasonable supply, would have been a traitor to his country, and would have merited the severest punishment? The vote of credit last year does actually invest the executive government with a discretionary power of applying the sums granted in a manner that might best suit the public exigencies, and the money applied to the service of the emperor is within the amount of the grant. I do not mean to say that the discretion thus vested in the crown is absolute and independent of the control of parliament, or that the minister, who exercises it in an improper manner, is exempted from censure; but in what manner I understand this limitation, I will state when I am called upon to make my defence. Whatever be the issue of this discussion, I cannot forbear observing, even at the risk of incurring the imputation of arrogance, that I would rather be convicted of having acted a principal part in the measure of granting a supply by which the salvation of Austria was secured, and the independence of Europe was maintained, than be acquitted for withholding that aid, by which the cause of our allies was sacrificed, and the general interests of mankind compromised. At present, however, the question is not, Whether the conduct of his Majesty's ministers was proper or improper; whether they were entitled to praise or deserving of punishment? The house have now to determine, Whether they shall announce to France that the supplies of the year are to be stopped, and the exertions of the executive power suspended? Whether at a moment of such critical importance we are to be reduced to the unhappy situation when we can neither prosecute the negociation with that confidence which is calculated to insure a favourable issue, nor prepare for war with an energy which can afford the prospect of success to our exertions?

The House divided on the question, that the word "now" stand part of the motion,

Ayes 164
Noes 58

The original question was then put, and carried.

December 14, 1796.

MR. FOX, after an introductory speech, condemning, as unconstitutional, the conduct of ministers in having granted money to the Emperor of Germany and the Prince of Condé, without the consent of Parliament, moved the following resolution: "That his Majesty's ministers, having authorised and directed, at different times, without the consent, and during the sitting of Parliament, the issue of various sums of money for the service of his Imperial Majesty, and also for the service of the army under the Prince of Condé, have acted contrary to their duty, and to the trust reposed in them, and have thereby violated the constitutional privileges of this House."

Mr. PITT then rose:

When I consider, Sir, the nature of the motion which is this day brought forward by the right honourable gentleman against his Majesty's ministers, and the serious charge which it involves, I must regard myself as particularly implicated in that charge, as possessing a particular share of responsibility in the conduct of that measure which is censured as a violation of the constitution, and a breach of the privileges of this house. I have, however, in the discussion of this question every thing to expect from the candour and justice of the house. An imputation of a most serious kind has been advanced against his Majesty's ministers; but it is necessary that all which may be offered on both sides should be fairly heard, before any decision can take place. It is requisite that gentlemen should be in full possession of every important fact that can be adduced, before they hasten to a conclusion which necessarily involves in it matter of such weight and magnitude. The house should clearly know the general principles on which it is to decide; it should know the grounds on which the theory of this part of the consti-

tution is erected: it should also know, what the particular instances are in point of practice that militate in a certain degree against the general principles. I say, Sir, when these considerations are once known, it will then be incumbent on the house to decide. But I trust it will not be denied, that until these points are completely and satisfactorily ascertained, the house ought, with every view to propriety, to suspend its determination. It is no small object of satisfaction to me, that the full review of former precedents with respect to the present motion, forms a chief ground of it. In such an application of facts, I have considerable reason to be pleased, and I trust I shall clearly demonstrate before I sit down, that former precedents concur in justifying the measure which is at this moment so severely condemned.

I am, however, not a little surprised to hear the language made use of by an honourable magistrate*, who has declared that he has received instructions from his constituents to join in a vote of censure against his Majesty's ministers, for having supplied the emperor with money without the authority of parliament. There is, perhaps, not any question on which a member ought to allow the decided dictates of his own conscience and judgment to be superseded by the instructions of his constituents; but if there is any case in which a member ought to be particularly anxious to preserve his right of private judgment, it is in the present instance, with respect to a criminal charge: for I think it must be admitted, that it was impossible for the honourable gentleman's constituents to decide in a just and candid manner, on the propriety of giving a vote on a motion, with the particulars of which they must have been unacquainted, and more peculiarly as they must have been totally ignorant of the defence which his Majesty's ministers meant to set up. I have, Sir, to caution the house against those constitutional doctrines which have been maintained in former debates, and particularly on Thursday night last. But without entering into a minute refutation of them, or stating those which I conceive to be strictly just, I cannot help observing, that much is saved for my purpose

* Alderman Combe.

by the concessions which the right honourable gentleman himself* has made. I certainly do not wish to goad the right honourable gentleman into the former opinions he has at different times maintained: I am better content to take his present statements: I am better content with what I have heard from him today, and with those general principles which have fallen from him in support of his motion. For as, on a former occasion, when the present subject was first started, the interval of one night made him see the measure more inflammatory than it really is; it now appears that a pause of a few days has diminished his ideas of the inflammatory tendency which, in his own opinion, it possessed. The right honourable gentleman has taken great pains to lay down the great constitutional principles with regard to pecuniary grants, and the use of these grants. I did understand, on a former night, that the honourable gentleman told us one thing, to which he said there was no exception, namely, that no expense could be incurred without the consent of parliament. I did not altogether subscribe to that doctrine, and I will state, as nearly as possible, the very words of the argument I then used in answer. I argued, that the practice of extraordinaries had been adopted at different periods of the history of the country, at periods the most approved in the history of the country, at least at periods which the honourable gentleman must naturally think the most approved—when he was himself in the administration. Extraordinaries, to a large amount, were used during the sitting of parliament, and parliament afterwards justified the act by a vote. The honourable gentleman did then admit, that he never could be supposed to have said that extraordinaries could not be used without the consent of parliament, previously obtained; but when ministers have now adopted the same measure, the propriety of which the honourable gentleman said, he could not be supposed to deny, yet such is his alarm, that he cannot feel himself justified in pausing a moment on the necessity of the actual condemnation of ministers.

However, Sir, it is enough for my purpose to admit, that, ac-

* Mr. Fox.

cording to the fundamental principles of the constitution, all grants must proceed from the commons; that they are afterwards subject to their control, is a principle undeniable: but although the commons are possessed of the power of controlling the application of the supplies raised by them, yet it is a circumstance proved to demonstration, by practice and general observation, that it would be impossible to carry on any wars, that it would be impossible for government to proceed with due regard for the public safety, or with advantage for the public service, if extraordinaries were not raised by parliament. In point of practice, it is evident they have been raised. Those great writers, who have written on the subject subsequent to the revolution, prove that extraordinaries have always been used from that period. I desire to refer to the practice of the whole of the succession of administrations, from the days of King William down to the present time, when the principles of the constitution are become infinitely more definite, and when, owing to ambition on the part of France, public expenses and the transactions of finance have attained a greater magnitude; and I ask, whether from that period down to the present, the practice of extraordinaries has not been recognized, and admitted? I do not mean of extraordinaries only, but of extraordinary services during the sitting of parliament. I do not state this, as if there was only one or two solitary precedents, but as the uniform practice of all the wars in which this country has been engaged; and that, during such wars, the extraordinaries have been precisely of the description I have stated. Sir, our constitution is one which rests on great and leading principles, but still no one would wish that the constitution should experience any injury by pushing those principles to a rigid and extreme excess. If we are to look into the record books of the constitution, we shall find certain principles laid down, which seem to contradict many acts of parliament, which are held as strictly legal. If we examine the law of parliament, we shall find, that it is derived principally from the general tenor of the whole of the principles of the constitution, illustrated by the par-

ticular urgency and necessity of circumstances. If this is the true way which men ought to study the constitution, by applying the principles of it to the exigency of circumstances, let me repeat what I stated on a former night, with respect to the impossibility of the measure being wrong, which was done in conformity to the best and most approved principles, as adapted to peculiar events: and let me also ask, how a measure can deserve to be loaded with obloquy and reproach, which in truth is no more than has been the practice of every administration, at those periods when we have been most proud of the constitution? I might remark, that the honourable gentleman, in the course of his speech, has admitted such to have been the practice, because he has himself acted upon it; yet I must admit that the honourable gentleman, when he stated that such was the practice, observed, that because extraordinaries were consonant to practice, it was no reason they should be extended so far, if it could possibly be avoided. The honourable gentleman, if I understand him right, by that very mode of argument, of the extension of the extraordinaries being attended with so much the more mischief, does, in fact, admit the exception to the principle which he charges me with having violated, and, in short, destroys in effect the very principle he before admitted. He told us that every extraordinary service involved the breach of the pledge to satisfy former estimates, by removing the means of paying them to some other service. If his doctrines mean to infer that extraordinaries ought not to be unnecessarily extended, I cannot but perfectly coincide with him: but if his argument has for its object that of rendering all extraordinaries invidious, I hope, in such case I may be allowed to guard the house against the effects of attending too much to topics opposed to the very same principles which he has before admitted. That extraordinaries are liable to the future observation and control of parliament, is true; but parliament has at all times felt, that it is necessary, for the public safety, that ministers should have the power of using extraordinaries, without appealing to parliament, provided

that power, and the means by which these extraordinaries are incurred, are subject to future discussion.

But it is not the question of extraordinaries only that arises. Parliament, finding the impossibility of reducing every thing to estimated expenses, has introduced the practice of giving votes of credit, with the power, generally, to apply them as exigencies might require. As far as it has been possible to provide against extraordinaries which always hitherto has been impracticable, every endeavour has been exerted; but it is a circumstance in which parliament have certainly acted with great wisdom, that it has not thought proper at any time to interfere with respect to the amount of the sums which ministers might think necessary for supplying the extraordinaries, but merely to make ministers responsible for the application of the sums, and the necessity of the extraordinaries, to the payment of which they are directed. Before I say any more, I will only observe, that it is not likely I should be one to dispute the propriety of the measure of providing for the extraordinaries by the extent of the vote of credit, if such a thing could be adopted; I have often heard it made a matter of reproach to me, that I endeavoured to estimate every expense and provide for it beforehand. The votes of credit were always smaller in former wars than in the present. In the present war, I have added to the vote of credit other provisions for the purpose of providing for the extraordinaries beforehand; I may therefore be considered as having done all in my power towards endeavouring to take the previous authority of parliament. What then do I say, that there is no difference between a vote of credit and extraordinaries? As to the vote of credit, I conceive it to be a privilege granted to his Majesty's ministers to employ a given sum to any such purpose as the exigency of affairs shall require. There is no circumstance, however unforeseen, there is no purpose, be it what it may, no possible event, to which ministers may not think it requisite that a vote of credit is applicable; no expenses upon sudden emergencies, which do not come within the spirit of a vote of credit, subject however to that principle which I shall state,

[Here Mr. Grey took notes of what fell from the Chancellor of the Exchequer.] I observe an honourable gentleman taking notes of what I have just mentioned, and by his manner he seems to express disapprobation. I only hope he will not interrupt me, till he has done me the honour to attend to the whole of what I say, when I have no doubt but I shall be able to convince him I am right. Have I said that, because a vote of credit is applicable to every public service, there is no question of responsibility? Have I said there is no principle of respect, of attention, of deference to parliament? I trust I have neither denied, nor at any one moment of my life have failed to shew by my conduct, that such responsibility does exist. I know that for every exercise of that discretion, regularly given by the act, founded upon the vote of credit, ministers are subject to the same responsibility as for the exercise of every other discretion, which permanently belongs to them as ministers of the crown, and which they are bound to use for the safety, the welfare, and the dignity of the country; a discretion the more important, as it relates to the disposition of the public money: and I trust parliament will not lose sight, that it is their duty to weigh those unforeseen difficulties on which alone government can use the powers with which it is entrusted.

But, Sir, I do not mean to stop here; I do not mean to say that government ought not to be questioned as to the propriety of the measures it may think proper to recur to. I have admitted its liability to be censured. I will admit, that if, at that time of using a vote of credit, ministers foresee any expenditure which appears likely to be of consequence, either with respect to its amount, or the importance or peculiarity of the subject, if it admits of a precise estimate, and if the subject is of such a nature that it can be divulged without injury or inconvenience to the public—should readily admit that that minister would fail in his duty to parliament, that he would not act according to the sound principles of what I believe to be the constitution of the country, if he were not to state the nature of the emergency, and endeavour to estimate the expense: but if from the nature

of the exigency, it should be impolitic to divulge it, in that case, I conceive the minister justified, who conceals it from parliament till a future season. By these principles, as to the general question, I am satisfied that my merits or demerits should be tried; if I have, in the opinion of the house, departed from the principles of the constitution, then I have committed an error in judgment: If through an error in judgment I have departed from the principles of the constitution, I admit that I ought to receive the censure of the house, notwithstanding that error proceeded from my having felt it my irresistible duty, in common with the rest of his Majesty's ministers, to act upon principles which I conceived the best calculated to ensure the prosperity and advantage of the country. Let me not be supposed to admit, what the honourable gentleman seems to assume as an instance of candour, namely, that he reserved the question, whether any degree of importance, which might attach to the subject, could possibly be considered an argument for concealing it, or that its importance could make any difference with regard to the estimate of its expense. Of the principle itself, it is not material to say more; but with respect to what the honourable gentleman has stated, I will make this observation. He has said that extraordinaries are admitted on account of indispensable necessity, and that those extraordinaries are such a mischief, that he almost doubts whether they should be suffered at all. I will admit that expense, be it what it will, is indubitably objectionable, and that if the expense arises to a considerable sum, the objection is still stronger; but the greater the expense, the higher is the advance on the responsibility of ministers, and the greater is the inducement for this house to vote to discharge those expenses. The only case has occurred which was in contemplation. If it should appear to the house, that, in consequence of an unforeseen change of circumstances, the necessity of expenditure was increased; if it should appear that the only opportunity had arrived, in which there was no alternative but that of relinquishing the cause in which the country was engaged, or of advancing the responsibility of mi-

nisters; if, I say, this should appear, is it a mark of candour in the honourable gentleman to desire that the urgency only should be put out of the question?

Why then, Sir, as to the utility of the advance to the emperor, whether it could have been made in a more proper form; whether, by a previous application to parliament, it would not have been attended with a greater degree of inconvenience; whether the advance was not made at a time the most critical that could possibly have occurred—these are questions which I shall shortly proceed to discuss. But, assuming for the present, that there was a difficulty about the mode of doing it, what mode under similar circumstances, would have been mor eligible? In this way it has been tried, and has succeeded: by previously applying to parliament, it is doubtful whether it would have succeeded or not. I intreat gentlemen to recollect the situation of the emperor on the Continent; the situation of this country, with respect to the prosecution of the war, or of its termination by a safe and honourable peace: I request them to look back to July or August last; a period when we saw with regret and apprehension the triumphant arms of the French Republic at the gates of Munich, and the territorial possessions of the belligerent powers in danger of being wrested from them. When they look back to this period, let them at the same time contemplate the slow, firm, measured and magnanimous retreat of the gallant Austrian army, and the consequences which followed from a retreat only calculated to insure the success of their future operations. Will they then ask themselves, dry as the question may be, when so animated a subject is presented to the mind, how far the assurance of the aid which this country was disposed to grant, may have invigorated the spirit of a country making its utmost efforts to resist an invading foe, how far it may have given confidence to their resources, and enabled them to prosecute that line of operations which has been attended with such distinguished success? With these considerations in his view, is there any man who can regard as a matter of consequence, whether the expense of 800,000*l.* or 1,200,000*l.* has been incurred to the country?

Is their any man who can question the propriety of the sum allotted for the object, and would be willing, for the sake of so paltry a saving, to give up our share in promoting a service, which has terminated so honourably for the character of our allies, and so beneficially for the general interests of Europe? Who would not rejoice that he was admitted into partnership so illustrious, and accompanied with such brilliant success?

——————*Me credite Lesbon,*
Me Tenedon, Chrysenque, & Cyllan Apollinis urbes,
Et Scyron cepisse. Meâ concussa putate
Procubuisse solo Lyrnessia mœnia dextrâ.

We have besides to consider, that whatever in this instance has been given, has only been lent to a power whom we have no reason to distrust. Even if a sum had been given to a much larger amount, it would surely have been amply repaid by the success which has attended the exertions of our allies, and the important advantages which have been gained to the common cause. In the course of discussion on this subject, frequent mention has been made of the opinion of the public. The public are not so dead or so insensible as either to be ignorant of the advantages which have been obtained, or ungrateful towards those to whose gallant exertions they are indebted on the present occasion. There is not a man, even the meanest individual in the country, who will not feel himself more than repaid for the small quota which he will be required to bring forward in aid of the public service, by the important benefits which have been secured to the general interests of Europe. There is not, I will venture to say, an Englishman who does not feel the most ardent sympathy with the magnanimity, the resources, the spirit, and perseverance which have been displayed by Austria in her recent exertions, and who does not rejoice that the contributions of England have been brought forward in aid of operations which have been equally marked by their gallantry and success. I will not think so ill of the good sense of my countrymen, as to suppose that they can regret any trifling expense, which has been the means of obtaining such signal advantages. The question

alone is, whether there is any doubt of the exigence of the measure, whether there is any doubt of its necessity, and whether the service would have been performed by a previous statement to parliament.

Here, Sir, let me state to this house, or rather repeat what I have shortly stated on a former night. The house will recollect, that from the principles on which I conceive a government should act, it never could have been in my contemplation, or that of his Majesty's ministers, under the vote of credit, to propose advancing the whole of the sum which turned out to be necessary for the emperor. That it was not my intention, is proved by this circumstance, that at the very period of proposing the vote of credit, a reserve was expressly made for a loan to be specifically brought forward, and submitted to parliament, to a much larger amount than the vote of credit. What inference do I wish to draw from this? First of all, that it is a pretty clear and evident proof, that it in reality appeared, by the Austrians being so much in want, that his Majesty's ministers had an impression of the necessity of assisting the emperor. Could they have any motive to hold out a loan, if there was no such thing in agitation? What view could any government have in stating the necessity of an Austrian loan, if they did not see the occasion for one? When we asked for the vote of credit, it was plain we were not asking for a vote of credit for services unforeseen, but that we intended to apply it as it has been applied. Gentlemen will recollect, that on the first loan of eighteen millions, it was stated as uncertain the precise time it would be called for; that the precise time depended on the result of an intercourse between his Majesty and the emperor, without which it was impossible to settle the extent of it. But it is true, I felt that in consequence of the extraordinary extent of the drain of money, some time would be necessary before the influx of trade would be such as to render a measure of that kind practicable in its execution, or safe in its impression; for of all subjects, that which relates to credit, or the stagnation of money, the delicacy of which every man knows, is that in which it is necessary to

be particularly circumspect. Now, how does this stand? I was sanguine that a much shorter interval would have diminished the scarcity. Afterwards, at a much later period, I found that it would be impossible to bring forward the loan. Under this impression, I did think it advisable to take the step I have taken, a short time previous to the end of last parliament. How far that can be fairly imputed to me as a crime, is a question I shall have occasion to discuss. However, this is the first principle of my defence, that when the campaign was advancing, so that the emperor could not wait for any proof of the reality of his hopes of an increase of pecuniary supply, in conformity to what had been done before, and according to principles recognized by parliament, I thought it expedient, for the success of his arms, to send the means of repelling the enemy.

The principal question is, whether this measure has deprived you of any thing you possessed? whether any disadvantage has been the consequence of it, so as to make our situation more embarrassed now than it would have been some months ago, by a loan taking place? I believe the situation of mercantile men, and the pecuniary state of the country, is more favourable now than they were at the periods when the several remittances to the emperor were issued. This I state not merely on the suggestions of any particular member of this house, not merely in consequence of any discovered public opinion; but I state it on evident grounds of reason. Nor can I for a moment suppose that the members of this house, that the public will long suspend the delegation of their assent to a measure founded equally in the justice and expediency of the motives which gave it birth. But however this may be, I have on this occasion the satisfaction of knowing that I am not stating my own sentiments only, but also those of the persons who were the contractors for the last loan. The contractors for that loan themselves felt then, and have since communicated to me, the inconveniences that had resulted to commerce in general, from the immense, but necessary drains in the money market. They had felt that any specific proposition to guarantee a fresh loan to the emperor would have

sensibly affected the money market: would have depreciated the funds, and depressed the public credit. Had I upon that occasion adopted the mode of a public loan; had I come to parliament, when parliament first sat to deliberate on public measures; had I, while the necessities of the empire and the dearest interests of Europe depended in some measure, the one for relief, the other for preservation, on the remittance of certain portions of that sum of 1,200,000*l.* — had I in that eventful crisis done any thing that might, in its ultimate consequences, increase the difficulties of that ally, endanger and risk the liberties of Europe, what, let me ask, would have been the language of the honourable gentleman, who has this night censured my conduct, and made it the subject of a specific motion? I repeat it: The persons best acquainted with the money market were, at the periods I have mentioned, deeply impressed with a sense of its growing embarrassment, and seriously felt the inconveniences necessarily concomitant to a state of warfare. They felt those inconveniences, but they more than felt the justice of the contest which had operated as the cause of them. In their opinion, the pecuniary situation of the country was such as would have rendered the public avowal of any loan to the emperor extremely impolitic, and by an ill-timed discussion of its propriety, have produced those evils I have in part detailed. To them I submitted whether a public loan would be prudent in such circumstances, but they were unanimous in their preference of the adopted mode. A proof this, that I could have no intention to violate the constitution. That I had not hastily, and immaturely adopted the alternative; that I made those preliminary arrangements; that my inquiries on the subject were as general and earnest as I have this night avowed, is well known, not only to the individuals with whom I consulted, but also to my colleagues in the ministry. I appeal, without fear of being contradicted, I appeal to those in my confidence, whether such were or such were not my sentiments, whether such was or was not my conduct on that occasion? At this time the situation of the empire was also so peculiar, that his Majesty's servants could not but have a

strong and influencing sense of the impropriety of affording publicly the aid that situation so much required. The arms of the French republic were victorious in almost every quarter, the empire threatened with destruction, and Europe with ruin. This was, I own, the reverse of our once favourable hopes: from the exertions of that ally our expectations had been different; but could any temporary reverse of circumstances justify a measure that must have entailed on that ally a permanent mischief? Surely we, who had considered ourselves entitled to share in the good fortune of the arms of Austria, would not justly have separated our interests in her adversity. Surely that ally, of whose good faith and candour, of whose steady attachment to the principles of the alliance we had so many and such splendid proofs; that ally, who had almost singly resisted the destructive progress of an impetuous and enthusiastic enemy; yes, the house of Austria eminently merited our confidence and our esteem. But these were not enough. The empire was in actual danger; her treasury exhausted; and many of her princes forced to abandon her defence. It was in this conjuncture that his Majesty's servants, faithful at least to their sense of the danger, afforded to Germany that assistance which I am proud to say had been in a great measure the means of saving not only that particular empire, but a vast portion of Europe. Actuated by these considerations, thus hurried by existing necessities, to adopt a particular measure, I flatter myself few who hear me will in the end fail to discover, that the act itself, even supposing it to be unconstitutional, could not be the result of a deliberate intention to violate acts of parliament.

The right honourable gentleman has supposed that the measure was now brought forward under cover of the glory of the Austrian successes; but I have to remind that honourable gentleman and the house, that the resolution of his Majesty's ministers, to assist the emperor, was taken not under the flattering phantom of delusive glory, not because the house of Austria was resuming, under the auspices of one of its illustrious members, its former spirit, and had regained its ardour; not because the

French had been forced to abandon some places, and retreat from others, in the German dominions; but their resolution was taken when ministers felt that they had an opportunity of giving to the emperor, Europe, and the country, the best pledge of their sincerity, of their attention to their interests, of their individual integrity, and collective force. The resolution was not taken without serious contemplation of the risk. It was not undertaken without maturely considering every relation, in which it could possibly connect itself with the constitution. It was not undertaken in defiance of law, nor made a solitary exception to all former usage. It was not undertaken to cripple our finances, nor had it, either prospectively or retrospectively, any one thing in common with a deliberate insult to the house. But it was undertaken in a way, and upon an emergency, which warranted the measure. Even the measure was warranted by the former opinions of my adversaries; but especially by the then and present opinion of monied men. I shall perhaps be asked, what is the difference between a loan in the manner that loan was transacted, and a loan granted in the old and popular way? What the difference between a direct and avowed disbursement of the public money, and an indirect and concealed disbursement? The former I shall, perhaps, be told, must have decreased the pecuniary resources of the country equally with the latter; and have lessened, though in a secret manner, the general means of commercial security. But to this I cannot concede, because the reverse has been the fact. The fact has been, that by remitting money to the emperor in that season of difficulty, of doubt, and danger, his Majesty's ministers have rendered less doubtful the prospects of a safe and honourable peace. Had ministers on that occasion, after being convinced themselves of the necessity and justice of such assistance, and during the recess of parliament, delayed the adoption of the conduct they have pursued, instead of affording to the emperor, the enemy, and Europe, a proof of superior wisdom and superior resources, it would be a proof of the want of both, by giving the money publicly. By discussing the subject in parliament at the earliest period, if such a discussion could be entered into, not only public credit would

have been injured, but you would have told the enemy that your difficulties obliged you to stint the acknowledged wants of your allies. To those who thought worse of our resources than I did, to the public mind in general, such a measure, in such a crisis, would, I know, have been a cause not of rejoicing, but of sorrow; not a source of pleasure, but of pain. Every man who wished well to his country, every man sincerely attached to the principles of the constitution, instead of approving of that assistance being afforded originally as a loan, would have said, No, do not commit yourself to your ally, so as to make your necessities a test of his. If, instead of endeavouring to poise and remove the difficulty as I have done, this house had so passed a public loan, such must have been the consequence. I am certain, that had parliament been acquainted with the danger of our ally, and had even determined to give the necessary assistance, the publicity of the measure would have defeated the object. So that, whether we had or had not been reduced to the alternative of refusing assistance altogether, the event must have produced collateral mischiefs. I may, therefore, I think, ask, Ought you to yield to the pressure of temporary difficulty, and abandon your ally at a moment when such a step may be decisive of his fate? Ought you, on the other hand, completely to pledge yourselves to grant a pecuniary assistance which, in the first instance, may be attended with considerable inconvenience, and the influence of which, on the future course of events, you are unable to ascertain? Pledges of aid, and of instant aid, his Majesty's servants had certainly seen good reason to give to the emperor. These pledges had been given long before the meeting of parliament, and might justly be considered as very eminently conducive to every measure and every success which has been since adopted and experienced. It is, I know, one among the grounds on which the right honourable gentleman has brought his accusation, that a part of the money was sent previously to the meeting of parliament, and another ground, that money has been sent since its meeting. I own, the advance to the emperor consists of sums sent since the meeting of the present parliament; but I do contend, that the pledges of these sums were the means

by which the house of Austria endured adversity, and retrieved its prosperity. Had the emperor, in July and August last, had no assurance of your assistance, I will not say we should have been at this moment a ruined people, but I will say, that the pecuniary security of England, and the territorial security of Austria, had been diminished, if not utterly destroyed.

On a former night, an honourable friend of mine used as an argument, the effect which he thought a public discussion of the measure would have to depreciate the credit of the country; and I own I have not yet heard any thing that could induce me to think differently on that subject. The effect of a knowledge of the pecuniary distresses of the emperor, joined to the difficulty which a prompt supply would have produced, could not fail to bear with peculiarly embarrassing weight on the course of exchange. Whereas the transmission of the sum of 1,200,000*l.* in different sums, and at different periods, tended greatly to relieve the emperor, and preserve the credit of this country from that depression which the same sum, granted at once, and in the form of a public loan, would have occasioned. I need not, therefore, enumerate the particular dates of those bills. Our assurance to Austria was not confined to the meeting of parliament, not subjected to the delays of several months of recess, but it was given with reference to every situation of difficulty or danger in which the arms of the emperor might be placed by their resistance to the arms of France. When the Austrian troops were retreating from their severe and glorious combat with the French republicans, they surely merited every assistance this country could afford them; but when, in the career of a brilliant series of the most splendid victories, those gallant men were urged by their emulation of the intrepidity of their invincible officers to acts of unparalleled prowess, his Majesty's servants found themselves called upon, most particularly called upon, to aid and promote their views, to soften their calamities, and to afford them means of securing their important conquests. On the conviction of the propriety of these sentiments, and of such conduct, it was, that the King's ministers had acted. Of the number of those who had

been guided by these sentiments, I, Sir, certainly was one, not the least active to provide, nor, I trust, the least vigilant to manage prudently, that pecuniary stimulus which, during the recess, and at other periods, was given to the arms of the empire. Our conduct, therefore, Sir, does not respect the months of October, of November, nor December, in particular, but it had a clear and unerring relation to every crisis and circumstance, to every moment of danger. In truth, the acts themselves were acts performed distinctly in compliance with solemn engagements; they were acts in execution of pledges which had been previously given. Acting during the recess from the conviction that these pledges were given by the letter and the spirit of the existing treaties, acting after the parliament was met, under the sanction of these treaties, with no intention then, and surely none now, of setting up their own judgments as the standard of, or superior to, the judgment of the house of commons, ministers, I think, may be permitted to avail themselves of the exceptions of all similar treaties in favour of similar conduct. As to the transaction itself, no separation could fairly be made of the necessity which gave existence to the measure, and the motives which influenced its adoption. Even supposing the judgment of parliament could have been taken, the state of Germany was such as could not have left gentlemen one moment to their doubts whether or no it was proper to assist the emperor. What ministers have done in pursuance of their pledge was, however, done in a great measure before parliament could have been assembled to consider its expediency. Of the nature and effect of the services performed by the emperor, gentlemen may very readily judge. They have them recorded in the annals of very recent periods, annals the most brilliant, perhaps, in the history of the world. Thus, whether we judge of the services of Austria in whole, or only in part, I think gentlemen must concede to me that the services of the last three months have been at least such as merit our particular approbation. On this part of the subject I have, therefore, at present, scarcely any thing more to remark. I have, in the best manner I am able, stated to the house the circumstance

of that situation which rendered it impossible for Austria to continue her warlike operations without assistance from this country. I have likewise endeavoured to render my own conceptions of the act of sending money to an ally without the previous consent of parliament. In addition to these, I have submitted to the house those principles, in the practical exertion of which I pursued that line of conduct now so much the subject of the animadversions of the right honourable gentleman.

With this species of defence, I might in some measure rest satisfied: but I should still be wanting in duty to myself, did I not, before I sat down this night, desire the house to keep in memory the principles I have thus stated, as being those on which I acted; if I did not desire the house to compare these principles with my conduct. As to the question of extraordinaries, I have heard the idea suggested, and something like an argument attempted to be deduced from it, that if its spirit be adhered to, no part of a vote of credit can be employed to pay foreign troops. I have heard too, that of such an application of the public money so voted, our annals scarcely afford any, and if any, not apposite precedents. Sir, I think I can instance a number of precedents of this kind; I can instance to this house, and for the information of the right honourable gentleman, that votes of credit were appropriated by our ancestors to the payment of foreign troops. In times before the revolution, but of those times gentlemen seem unwilling to say much, in the reign immediately before the revolution, this very thing had been done by the crown; but, Sir, in periods subsequent to the revolution, in periods not the least favoured in our annals, although certainly not altogether free from the stains of calumny, but especially of party violence, in the reign of King William, during the year 1701, accompanied by circumstances of a singularly important and curious nature, the parliament voted an extra sum for the payment of foreign forces. This sum was voted not regularly as a vote of credit, but it succeeded the granting of a vote of credit, and was a measure which, although it occasioned some trifling opposition, was carried unanimously. Such was

the conduct of our ancestors at the revolution. In the reign of Queen Ann, a reign reprehended undoubtedly by some, a reign which had unhappily encouraged, if not occasioned and fomented, those differences which rendered the Tories so implacable against the Whigs; in that reign, thus chequered by the persecutions, sanguinary persecutions, first of the Whigs, but latterly, and I will confess with not less cruelty, begun and continued by the Tories: in this reign, and in the years 1704 and 1705, both subsidies and grants had been employed in paying foreign forces. This, too, was done without the authority of parliament. In 1706, a transaction more directly characteristic of this, for which the ministers of the present day are censured, was publicly avowed, and as publicly discussed; yet it seems the right honourable gentleman had overlooked it. This at least seems to be the case; or, if known, he certainly ought to have abandoned his assertion. There is to be met with in the annals of the parliament of that day, an account of three different sums, each considered, by the opposition of that day, as violations of the constitution—a remittance to the Duke of Savoy, to the Emperor, and to Spain. A sum too had been paid in the same manner to the Landgrave of Hesse, for a corps of his troops then in the pay of England. All these sums were not voted regularly after the specific propositions, submitted for that purpose to the house, but were remitted to those sovereigns without the previous consent of parliament. Not even estimates of the services for which the sums had been paid, were laid before the house till six weeks after its meeting. The sum sent to the emperor was peculiarly distinguished—it had been transmitted, not at the close, not during the recess of that session in which it was first announced to parliament, but before the end of the preceding session. These proceedings did certainly attract notice. The house of commons and the public had been addressed on the unconstitutionality of the measure; then, as now, there had been employed every effort which ingenuity could suggest; every vehicle of public communication rendered a vehicle of asperity and censure on the conduct of ministers. It

became the subject of a solemn discussion—a discussion, apparently not less vehement, than it was laboured and profuse. But how, Sir, did the ministers of that day retire from the combat? Did they retire overwhelmed with the virulence and abuse, the censure of the discerning and temperate members of that parliament? Or were those their actions distinguished by the approbation of the commons of Great Britain? Sir, the minister of that day had the satisfaction to see the attack of his adversaries repelled, and their expressions of censure changed to approbation. That minister, Sir, heard his conduct applauded, and the journals of this house were made to bear record that the sense of its members was, that the sums advanced to the emperor on that occasion had been productive not only of the preservation of the empire, but had also supported and maintained the interests of Europe. In the year 1718, in the beginning of the reign of George the First, an instance of the application of the public money occurred, which, though not so analogous as the last, I think it right to mention. A message had been received from his Majesty, soliciting the aid of the commons to make such an augmentation of the actual forces of the country as might be deemed necessary to place it in a respectable state of defence; and that because there had been an appearance of an invasion—At this time his Majesty takes Dutch troops into his pay, and the money voted to raise and maintain native troops is disbursed for the use of a foreign corps. It is true this body of Dutch troops were landed in England, and their services confined to it; but not even these affected much the application of the fact as a precedent. However, Sir, in the year 1734, a period nearer our own times, a general vote of credit was granted. That vote of credit was applied on such occasions, and for such purposes, as might, at any time during its existence, arise out of the exigencies of the time. On the 18th of February of the subsequent year, a vote of credit was also granted, and a treaty concluded with Denmark. And, Sir, if I have not totally misconceived the passage of our parliamentary history where these facts are stated, this last, as well as the vote of credit immediately pre-

ceding it was applied to purposes in their nature not unlike those to which necessity impelled the ministers of the present day to apply the vote of 1796. I might also refer gentlemen to another instance of an advance to foreign troops. An advance to the Duke of Aremberg, commander of the Austrian forces, in the year 1742, was noticed in debate, and censured in the administration of Mr. Pelham—a name this as dear to the friends of constitutional liberty as perhaps any that could be mentioned: but the inquiry was avoided by moving the previous question. It happened, however, that, not long after, the same question was made the subject of a specific discussion. It appeared that the advance had been made under the authority of an assurance expressed by Lord Carteret, and not in consequence of any previous consent of parliament; but it appeared also that the progress of the Austrian troops was considerably accelerated by the influence of that aid, and their subsequent successes owing chiefly to it. The vote of censure, therefore, which had been founded on the act of Lord Carteret, was amended, and the advance declared necessary to the salvation of the empire. But, Sir, let us compare the crisis of 1796 with that of 1787, when the expenses incurred by our endeavours to protect Holland were recognized under the head of secret services. This, too, was an unanimous recognition of the act which, had it been the offspring of 1796, the right honourable gentleman, influenced by his new opinions, would, I have no doubt, marked with his disapprobation; but so stood the fact then.

The right honourable gentleman avoids no opportunity to express his disrespect for the memory of the last parliament. But surely he ought to recollect, that, although he has often told us that the last parliament completely undermined the constitution, there yet remain principles for which the right honourable gentleman thinks it his duty to contend, under the sanction of which, he is yet permitted to accuse his Majesty's ministers as criminals for doing that which necessity provoked, and which precedents warrant. Undoubtedly, Sir, I think that whether the people of England will hereafter approve of the conduct of

opposition as constitutional conduct, they will admit that it is a vigilant opposition. On the present occasion, however, much of that vigilance seems to me to have been exerted in vain. They have not, with all their industry, fallen even in the way of one precedent, that might have induced some little relaxation of their inordinate zeal. They have not discovered that the act they have marked with every species of obloquy, of which language is capable, is an act that has been again and again approved of. It is even within the admitted principle of successive parliaments. But the members who sat in the last parliament have not forgot that, when a loan of four millions and a half was proposed to be granted to the emperor, the intention of granting that loan was known as early as February 1795. A message had been received from his Majesty, stating that a negociation was pending with the emperor to maintain 200,000 men. The loan to be granted when the negociation succeeded, and when it failed, to be mentioned. Soon after the answer to this message was communicated to the throne, a motion was made for an account of 250,000*l.* advanced to the emperor in May, 1795; and again a similar motion was made for an account of 300,000*l.* also advanced to the emperor in the month of May following. With respect to these sums, it was agreed by the house before the loan was debated, that they might be afterwards made good out of the loan. This, Sir, I have stated to shew that the members who sat in the last parliament cannot be altogether ignorant of the principles of the constitution. After the negociation was concluded, the loan was debated; the house was divided, but no objection was made to these advances. On the subject of the Prince of Condé's army being supplied with money by this country, I can only say, that whatever sums that army has as yet received have been paid, on account of services rendered, as forming a part of the Austrian forces. The circumstance of a part of the 1,200,000*l.* stated as being sent to the emperor, being afterwards received in this country in part payment of the interest due on the second Austrian loan, is also easily accounted for, these payments, on account of being in their nature the

same, as if the emperor, instead of being so accommodating to himself as to pay the money, by his agent, on the spot, had ordered it to be sent to Vienna, and transmitted by the same post to this court.

I may now, Sir, I think be permitted to ask on what principle of justice a criminal charge can be brought against me for merely having followed the uniform tenor of precedent, and the established line of practice? By what interpretation of a candid and liberal mind can I be judged guilty of an attempt, wantonly to violate the constitution? I appeal to the right honourable gentleman himself, who is not the last to contend for the delicacy which ought to be used in imputing criminal motives to any individual, and to urge in the strongest terms the attention which ought to be shewn to the candid and impartial administration of justice. In what country do we live? and by what principles are we to be tried? By the maxims of natural justice and constitutional law, or by what new code of some revolutionary tribunal? Not longer than a year and a half since, the same principle was adopted, and suffered to pass without any animadversion; and now, at a crisis of ten-fold importance, and where the measure has not outrun the exercise of a sound discretion, it is made the foundation of a criminal charge. We are accused with a direct and wanton attack upon the constitution. It is not supposed that we have been actuated by any but the blackest and most malignant motives. We are not allowed the credit of having felt any zeal for the interest of our country, nor of those advantages which the measure has produced to the common cause.

I have now weighed the whole merits of the transaction before the house, and with them I am well content to leave the decision. While we claim a fair construction on the principles and intentions which have guided our conduct, if it shall appear that it has in the smallest instance deviated from any constitutional principle, we must submit to the consequence, whatever be the censure or the punishment. It is our duty, according to the best of our judgment, to consult for the interest of the country:

it is your sacred and peculiar trust to preserve inviolate the principles of the constitution. I throw myself upon your justice, prepared in every case to submit to your decision; but with considerable confidence, that I shall experience your approbation. If I should be disappointed, I will not say that the disappointment will not be heavy, and the mortification severe; at any rate however it will to me be matter of consolation, that I have not, from any apprehension of personal consequences, neglected to pursue that line of conduct which I conceive to be essential to the interests of the country and of Europe. But while I bow with the most perfect submission to the determination of the house, I cannot but remark on the extraordinary language which has been used on this question. Ministers have been broadly accused with a wanton and a malignant desire to violate the constitution: it has been stated that no other motive could possibly have actuated their conduct. If a charge of such malignant intention had been brought against men, who have affirmed the present war to be neither just nor necessary, and who on that ground cannot be supposed friendly to its success; who have extolled, nay, even exulted in the prodigies of French valour; who have gloried in the successes of the foes of civil liberty, the hostile disturbers of the peace of Europe, men who blasphemously denied the existence of the Deity, and who had rejected and trampled on every law, moral and divine; who have exclaimed against the injustice of bringing to trial persons, who had associated to overawe the legislature; those who gravely and vehemently asserted, that it was a question of prudence, rather than a question of morality, whether an act of the legislature should be resisted; those who were anxious to expose and aggravate every defect of the constitution; to reprobate every measure adopted for its preservation, and to obstruct every proceeding of the executive government to ensure the success of the contest in which we are engaged in common with our allies; I say, if such a charge of deliberate and deep-rooted malignity were brought against persons of this description, I should conceive that even then the rules of candid and charitable

interpretation would induce us to hesitate in admitting its reality; much more when it is brought against individuals, whose conduct, I trust, has exhibited the reverse of the picture I have now drawn. I appeal to the justice of the house, I rely on their candour; but, to gentlemen who can suppose ministers capable of those motives which have been imputed to them on this occasion, it must be evident that I can desire to make no such appeal.

An amendment was afterwards moved by Mr. Bragge, to leave out from the first word "that," and to insert, "the measure of advancing the several sums of money, which appear, from the accounts presented to the House in this session of parliament, to have been issued for the service of the Emperor, though not to be drawn into precedent, but upon occasions of special necessity, was, under the peculiar circumstances of the case, a justifiable and proper exercise of the discretion vested in his Majesty's ministers by the vote of credit and calculated to produce consequences, which have proved highly advantageous to the common cause and to the general interests of Europe:" which upon a division was carried;

Ayes 285
Noes 81

December 30, 1796.

Mr. PITT moved the order of the day for taking into consideration his Majesty's message, respecting the failure of the negociation for peace that had been carrying on with the French government.

"GEORGE R.

"It is with the utmost concern that his Majesty acquaints the House of Commons, that his earnest endeavours to effect the restoration of peace have been unhappily frustrated, and that the negociation, in which he was engaged, has been abruptly broken off by the peremptory refusal of the French government to treat, except upon a basis evidently inadmissible, and by their having in consequence required his Majesty's Plenipotentiary to quit Paris within 48 hours.

"His Majesty has directed the several memorials and papers which have been exchanged in the course of the late discussion, and the account transmitted to his Majesty of its final result, to be laid before the House.

"From these papers his Majesty trusts, it will be proved to the whole

world that his conduct has been guided by a sincere desire to effect the restoration of peace on principles suited to the relative situation of the belligerent powers, and essential for the permanent interests of this kingdom, and the general security of Europe: whilst his enemies have advanced pretensions at once inconsistent with those objects, unsupported even on the grounds on which they were professed to rest, and repugnant both to the system established by repeated treaties, and to the principles and practice which have hitherto regulated the intercourse of independent nations.

"In this situation, his Majesty has the consolation of reflecting, that the continuance of the calamities of war can be imputed only to the unjust and exorbitant views of his enemies; and his Majesty, looking forward with anxiety to the moment when they may be disposed to act on different principles, places in the mean time the fullest reliance, under the protection of Providence, on the wisdom and firmness of his parliament, on the tried valour of his forces by sea and land, and on the zeal, public spirit, and resources of his kingdoms, for vigorous and effectual support in the prosecution of a contest, which it does not depend on his Majesty to terminate, and which involves in it the security and permanent interests of this country, and of Europe. G. R."

The message being read from the chair, Mr. PITT addressed the House to the following effect:

I am perfectly aware, Sir, in rising upon the present occasion, that the motion which I shall have the honour to propose to the house, in consequence of his Majesty's most gracious message, and founded upon the papers with which it was accompanied, involves many great and important considerations. Whatever difference of opinion may be entertained upon some of the topics which they contain, I am sure there will exist only one sentiment with regard to the event which they announce. We must all concur in that deep and poignant regret which is naturally excited by the information that the negociation, in which his Majesty was engaged, is abruptly broken off; a negociation by which we fondly wished, and perhaps might have sanguinely hoped, that upon terms of peace, which it would have been wise and prudent, and honourable in this country to have embraced, we should at length have been enabled to have retired from a contest undertaken in compliance with the faith of

treaties and for the defence of our allies; undertaken to repel the daring, unprincipled, and unprovoked aggression of the enemy; undertaken for the maintenance of our own independence and the support of our own rights; undertaken for the preservation of our constitution and laws, and in obedience to those principles of policy by which the conduct of England has so long and so gloriously been directed; undertaken from an union of all these causes and a combination of all these motives, to a degree for which the annals of the world present no parallel. From the documents of which the house are now in possession, and from the proceedings of which they are now enabled to judge, I trust it will appear, that if it was thought necessary to embark in the contest upon such urgent grounds and such powerful considerations, his Majesty's ministers have evinced a perseverance equally sincere in their endeavours to restore peace to Europe upon fair, just, and honourable grounds, in spite of the discouragements under which they laboured, and the difficulties with which they had to encounter. To whatever cause, however, the failure of the negociation is to be ascribed, it must be matter of regret to all, and to none more than to myself. Whatever subject of personal anxiety I may have had, in addition to the common feelings of humanity and for the general happiness of mankind, my sentiments are only those of disappointment. But I have the satisfaction of knowing that this feeling of disappointment is unaccompanied with any reflection, unmingled with regret, unembittered with despondency, as it must be evident to the world, that the event which we deplore can be attributed only to the pride, the ambition, the obstinacy, and the arrogant pretensions of the enemy. I feel this consolation annexed to the task which we have now to perform, that we can come forward, not unaware of the difficulty, yet not dismayed by the prospect, prepared to review the situation in which we are placed to ask what are the causes from which the failure of the negociation proceeded, what opinion it authorizes us to form, what conduct it requires us to pursue, what duty it imposes upon us to discharge, and what efforts we are called upon to exert in our

own defence, and what support and assistance policy demands that we should grant to our allies for the vigorous and effectual prosecution of a contest in which we are compelled to persevere.

As to the next point which I shall have to consider, I cannot expect equal unanimity; not, however, that it is much more complicated, although undoubtedly not so self-evident. I allude to the failure of the negociation, in point of terms, and which renders a continuance of the war necessary; but have we not the consolation that the aggression has uniformly been on the side of the enemy, and that nothing has been wanting on the part of this country to restore peace, on the grounds on which peace alone would be desirable? When we wish for peace, we wish for a secure and permanent peace, and the secure and permanent possession of those blessings with which peace is accompanied.

If, in that necessity to which we are now subjected, of pursuing with vigour the war in which we are engaged, we can look for consolation, amid the sacrifices with which it will be attended, to the original aggression of the enemy by which it was occasioned, to the consideration, that no endeavour has been omitted which can evince our earnest and sincere desire of peace, and that this sentiment still predominates to put an end to the contest upon those principles which alone can render that event desirable; which can secure a peace, safe, honourable, and permanent, which can restore those blessings which it is calculated to produce, and those advantages for which it is worthy to be desired; —if we have adhered to these considerations, we have done every thing which it was in our power to perform. We may lament the failure of his Majesty's exertions upon this occasion, but at least we have not to regret that they have been wholly without advantage. They must prove to which party the prolongation of the war is to be imputed; they will tend at once to unite England and to divide France; they will animate our endeavours with new energy and new confidence, while they must have the effect to enfeeble and to embarrass the operations of the

enemy. The question is not merely how far his Majesty's ministers and those to whose province it is committed to judge of the terms upon which peace ought to be concluded, and what offers are to be proposed, (a duty always attended with difficulty, but in the present circumstances peculiarly embarrassed and unusually critical) acted properly in the conditions upon which they were willing to treat: but after the propositions which were made had been rejected; when, instead of yours, terms utterly inadmissible and glaringly extravagant were substituted; when, to a peremptory rejection was added the refusal of all farther discussion; when the negociation was abruptly broken off, and his Majesty's ambassador was sent away; when all this is accompanied with a proceeding still more insulting than the original dismissal, when a condition is reserved, which is not even the semblance, but which stands undisguised as the most glaring mockery of negociation, it remains for the house to judge whether any thing has been wanting upon the part of ministers, whether any thing more is required to display the sentiments and the views of the enemy. It remains to be seen whether there are any gentlemen in this house, who, as friends to peace, as friends to their country, who, consistent with the principles of statesmen, or the feelings of patriots, can discover any alternative in the ultimate line of conduct to be pursued. From the manner in which what I have now said has been received, I hope it will not be incumbent upon me to dwell more particularly upon this topic, before I advert to others which come previously to be considered.

The two leading points which arise from the views connected with the subject in discussion, are, the sentiment which it is proper to express upon the steps to be taken by his Majesty for the purpose of obtaining peace, and then, combining the offers made with the rejection of the enemy, and the circumstances with which it was accompanied, what sentiment parliament and the nation ought to entertain, with regard to the conduct necessary to be adopted for our own security, for maintaining the cause of our allies, and protecting the independence of Europe.

After the communications which have already been made of the former steps taken by this country, and on the part of the emperor, for the purpose of bringing the contest to a termination, it would be unnecessary to dwell upon the particulars of these transactions. I would beg leave, however, to remind the house, that, in March 1796, offers were made to the French government, by his Majesty's envoy at Basle, Mr. Wickham, to treat for a general peace, in a manner which of all others had been most usual in a complicated war, a mode sanctioned by custom and justified by experience, which had been commonly found successful in attaining the objects for which it was intended; yet this proposal met with a refusal, and was affected to be received as a mark of insincerity. We find the enemy advancing a principle, to which I shall afterwards more particularly advert; so manifestly unjust, and so undeniably absurd, that whatever difference of opinion subsisted upon other points, there was no man living had the temerity to support it. The question upon the former discussions to which this transaction gave rise, was, whether the principle to which I allude was fairly imputed. In the answer to Mr. Wickham's note, when we found the government of France advancing a law of her own internal constitution, to cancel the obligation of treaties, and to annul the public law of Europe, the only doubt was, whether it was fair and candid, upon such a foundation, to ascribe to the directory the reality of such a pretension. The principle itself I am sure can never be successfully defended upon any law of nations or any argument of reason. The emperor too, in spite of the refusal with which the application of this country had been received; in spite of the discouragement which a new attempt presented; did, at the opening of the campaign, renew the offers for negociating a general peace upon the principles upon which the proposition of this country had been founded. In the course of this eventful year, so chequered with remarkable vicissitudes, before the successes of the enemy, which unfortunately so rapidly followed the breaking of the armistice, and before the glorious tide of victory by which the latter period of

the campaign had been distinguished, many instances occurred for the application of their principle. The proposition of the emperor, however, was received nearly in the same manner with our own; and even the answer which it produced was conceived in the same tone, and conveyed the same unfounded imputation, excepting that there were some topics with regard to points of etiquette and differences about form, which, upon the application of this country, had not been observed till they were renewed upon the perusal of reports of certain proceedings in this house, whether faithfully detailed or not I will not inquire. The answer which the emperor received was, that he might send a plenipotentiary to Paris to treat for a peace, consistent with the laws and constitution of the republic. Notwithstanding the discouragement which the repeated experience of former disappointments was calculated to produce, his Majesty, retaining that desire of putting a period to hostilities by which he was uniformly animated, felt some hope from the distress to which France was reduced, and from the embarrassments under which she laboured, that a renewed proposal would be welcomed with a more friendly reception. To shew that the inveterate disposition which the enemy had manifested did not discourage his Majesty from giving another chance of success to his ardent wishes, without having witnessed any indication upon their part of sentiments more pacific or more conciliatory, without their having discovered any retraction of the principles which had been advanced in reply to his first proposal, his Majesty determined to try the experiment of a new attempt of negociation, to the circumstances of which I shall again recur.

Upon many occasions during the present contest it had been discussed, whether it was politic for this country to appeal to negociation in whatever circumstances the enemy were placed. Gentlemen on the other side were accustomed to press the argument, that in no situation could negociation be humiliating. If a sincere desire of peace, it was said, does exist, there are modes of ascertaining the dispositions of the enemy, of making your wishes known, and making advances to the attainment of the object,

without involving any question of etiquette or provoking any discussion of forms.—Of all the modes then recommended, that of application through the medium of a neutral minister was the most approved. After the reception which the successive proposals of this country, and of the emperor, received at Basle, the mode of application by a neutral power, by that very power which had been again and again cited as an instance of the good faith of the French government, and their respect for independent states, was at length adopted, and the Danish minister was pitched upon for this purpose. In this proceeding it was not the object to announce on what terms this country was willing to conclude a peace, not to avoid any objections of etiquette, not to evade any discussion of preliminary formalities, but merely to ascertain the point, whether the directory would grant passports to a confidential person whom his Majesty was willing to send to Paris. The application was accordingly made by the Danish resident, and, after an interval of some days' delay, this step was allowed to pass in silence; to a written application no answer was returned, and at last a verbal notification was given, that the directory could not listen to any indirect application through the medium of neutral powers, and that a plenipotentiary might proceed to the frontiers, and there wait for the necessary passports.

I would now ask the house to judge, if it had really been the wish of his Majesty's ministers to avail themselves of the plausible grounds for proceeding no farther, which were then presented, which could so easily be justified by a reference to the conduct of the French government, and by the dispositions by which experience had proved them to be guided, would they have been very eager again to try the issue of new attempts? But even to this they submitted, and by a flag of truce sent to the governor of Calais, directly demanded the necessary passports.—The directory, now feeling the eagerness with which this country pursued the desire of terminating the contest by negociation, and, foreseeing the od[illegible] with which the refusal would be attended, were compelled, I repeat, were compelled, to grant the pass-

ports, and thus to afford to his Majesty the opportunity of presenting the outline of the terms upon which peace might be restored. Under circumstances like these, with the experience of an uniform tenor of conduct which testified the very reverse of any disposition to a cordial co-operation for the re-establishment of peace, there was little hope that the French government would keep pace with the offers proposed by this country, and it was foreseen that it would rest with his Majesty, after stimulating their reluctant progress through every part of the discussion, to encounter the further difficulty of proposing specific terms. In this embarrassing situation the first thing to be done was to endeavour to establish what is at once conformable to reason, sanctioned by usage, and agreeable to universal practice since negociation was first reduced to a system; I mean some basis upon which the negociation was to be founded. How usual such a practice had been, it would be unnecessary to argue; how reasonable, it would be impossible to dispute; as it must be evident that such a mode of proceeding must conduce to abridge the delay with which a discussion of this kind is apt to be attended, to afford a clue to that labyrinth of complicated interests that are to be considered, and to supply some rule of stating mutual propositions. It would be equally unnecessary, as this mode was to be adopted in a negociation where we, for ourselves directly, had so little to ask, and for our allies so much, and where the interests of Europe demanded such important claims; where we had to treat with a country which had advanced principles that destroyed all former establishments; that cancelled all received laws and existing treaties; that overthrew all experience of past proceeding. This basis then was to be a basis of compensation, not of ambition or aggrandizement, but that compensation which was due for the conquests achieved by the valour and perseverance of our forces from the acquisitions gained by the enemy; a basis than this I am confident more equitable, or more just, better calculated to secure the interests of our allies, to maintain the independence of Europe, or more honourable to this country, never was proposed. But whether this basis be reasonable or

not, is not now so much the inquiry, as another proof of the views of the enemy is disclosed, and a fresh instance of the inveterate disposition of the French government is displayed. Before any explicit answer to the basis proposed was returned; when it was understood that it was to be rejected, Lord Malmesbury is required, within twenty-four hours, to present his *ultimatum*. It appears, however, from the able manner in which Lord Malmesbury conducted himself upon this demand, that this demand was not insisted upon, and to his explanation, they replied only by an evasive answer, which announced their refusal of the basis proposed, and intimated the extravagant pretensions they were desirous to substitute. I will now put to the recollection of the house the public discussions, to which the subject of the basis of negociation presented to the French government gave rise. I will not say that the public was unanimous, nor will I pretend to decide in what proportions it was divided. None, however, doubted that this basis would not be agreed to. In the public discussion to which the plan was subjected (by this I do not mean parliamentary discussions) and in the writings which it produced, particularly in the metropolis, the argument maintained was, that the principle was unreasonable, and ought not to have been offered. The directory, however, thought proper to accept what it was argued in this country ought to have been refused, and the principle of compensation was admitted.

Having, I trust, shewn therefore, from the extorted confession which arises out of every statement, that the basis of compensation was accepted, there follow the particular terms, as far as they were the subject of negociation. It is a point well understood that the final terms to be considered as binding upon the parties, never form a part of the original proposition. What, however, is the case here? When the first advances were made by this country, they were met by no corresponding offers by the directory, every difficulty that was started and removed, prepared only new cavils; the demands made by us were accompanied by no disclosure of the terms to which they would accede. After a reluctant admission of the basis, they insisted upon a specific

statement of the objects of compensation. Under circumstances similar to those upon which the negociation was begun, the difficulties with which it is attended must be obvious, and the common practice has been, as far as possible, to divide them, to render the statement of terms mutual, to give reciprocally, and at the same time, the explanations, the concessions, and the demands upon which each party is disposed to insist. The propriety of this is obvious. Without such a mode of proceeding it is impossible to know what value the one sets upon a particular concession, or a particular acquisition, and upon what conditions this is to be abandoned, and how the other is to be compensated. This difficulty obtains in all negociations, more particularly where doubts are entertained of the sincerity of the party with whom you have to deal, but most of all when no advance, no reciprocal offer is made. How difficult then must it have been under all the circumstances of this case to produce specific terms with any probability of success or advantage. Yet the same motives which had induced his Majesty on former occasions to surmount the obstacles presented by the enemy, induced him here likewise to remove every pretence of cavil. Plans were given in, signed by Lord Malmesbury, stating likewise terms for the allies of this country. In the outline, two things are to be kept separate and distinct—the compensations demanded for our allies, and those which were intended to protect the balance of Europe.

I need not argue again that a basis of compensation is reasonable; that I am entitled to assume as admitted: but to what enormous extent it was retracted, I am now to state. During that period of adverse fortune which has since by the valour and glory of the gallant Imperial army so remarkably been retrieved, considerable possessions belonging to Austria and other states were added to the acquisitions of the enemy. On the other hand, the success of our brave troops, retarded indeed in particular quarters by some untoward circumstances, though not obstructed, had added to our distant possessions, and extended, by colonial acquisitions, the sources of our commerce, our wealth, and our prosperity, to a degree unparalleled even in the annals of this

country. Feeling the pressure, which the war, no doubt, gave to our commerce, but feeling too that it neither affected the sources of our commerce, nor would ultimately retard the full tide of our prosperity, I was convinced that the temporary embarrassments which occurred, were less the effect of a real distress, than of an accidental derangement arising from our increasing capital and extended commerce. In looking round, you discovered no symptom of radical decay, no proof of consuming strength; and although I have been accused of advancing a paradox, while I maintained this proposition, I am convinced that the embarrassment stated as an evidence of decline, was a proof of the reality and the magnitude of our resources. I do not state these circumstances, to give any one an idea that I do not ardently wish for peace, but to shew that we are not yet arrived at so deplorable a state of wretchedness and abasement, as to be compelled to make any insecure and dishonourable compromise. What, on the other hand, was the situation of the enemy? They at first indeed were enabled to employ gigantic means of support, which from their extravagant nature, were temporary, not permanent. They find also the additional expedient of disseminating new, unheard of, destructive principles; these they poured forth from the interior of France, into all the quarters of Europe, where no rampart could be raised to oppose the dangerous, the fatal inundation. Although madness and fanaticism carried them thus far for a time, yet no rational man will deny that those persons formed a fair and reasonable conclusion, who thought that such resources could not be attended with either duration or stability. I need hardly recur to the subject of French finance, though it has a very considerable effect indeed upon the question. I have on this subject been accused of bringing forward groundless surmises, of using fanciful reasoning, of stating elaborate theories without authority. I have even been complimented on my dexterity at this sort of argument, for the kind purpose of afterwards converting it into ridicule; but I shall not now stop to confirm what in this respect I have formerly asserted: I may surely, however, suppose that the admissions of

the executive directory are true, particularly when officially conveyed in the form of a message to one of their councils. Are we told by themselves, that the only pay of their troops are the horrors of nakedness and famine; that their state contractors, their judges, and all other public functionaries, receive no part of their salaries; that the roads are impassable, that the public hospitals and general interests of charity are totally neglected; that nothing, in short, remains in a state of organization but murder and assassination? Is this a true picture drawn by themselves, and can this be the time for Europe to prostrate itself at the foot of France—suppliantly to bow the knee, and ignominiously to receive its law?

If these considerations would not have justified this country in refusing to treat unless upon the principle of restoring to the emperor the territories of which he has been stripped, at least it is sufficient reason to entitle us to refuse to the French republic in the moment of debilitated power and exhausted resource, what we should have disdained to grant to France in the proudest days of her prosperous and flourishing monarchy. It was reason enough why we should not desert our allies, nor abandon our engagements, and why we should not agree to yield up to France for the pretence of preventing future wars, what for two centuries our ancestors thought it wise to contend to prevent the French from obtaining possession of; and why, after the recorded weakness of the republic, we ought not to resign without a struggle, what the power and the riches of France in other times could never extort? What then were we to attain by the conquests we had achieved? For ourselves, we had nothing to ask; we demanded the return of no ancient possessions: we sued not for liberty to maintain our independence, to reject the fraternal embrace, and prevent the organization of treason. These do not rest upon the permission of the enemy; they depend upon the valour, the intrepidity, and the patriotism of the people of this country. We desired, Sir, only to preserve our good faith inviolate, and were ready to sacrifice all our own advantages, to obtain what we could not honourably give away without the consent of the

emperor. Could we possibly ask less at the outset of a negociation? I touch, no doubt, upon a delicate subject, but I ask, could we even have demanded the consent of the emperor to ask less? Whatever might have been the disposition of the emperor to peace, would he have been content to agree to inferior terms, when the campaign was not yet closed—when the enemy were yet struck with the effects of the brilliant and glorious success with which the Imperial arms have lately been attended on the side of the Rhine, when the exertions in Italy might have been expected to communicate to the affairs of Austria in that quarter, the same tide of victory by which the frontiers of Germany were distinguished? Could we have asked less, consistently with the good faith we owe to that ally, to whose exertions and to whose victories we have been so much indebted; that ally to whom we are so closely bound by congenial feelings, with whom we participate in the glory of adversity retrieved, and of prosperity restored? In doing this, I am confident the house will agree in thinking that we do not do too much.

By the terms proposed, all the territory between the Rhine and the Moselle was to be ceded by France, subject to future modification. When the French conquests in Italy were stated as objects of restitution, it was not from that to be inferred that Savoy and Nice were included, for in no geographical view could they be considered as component parts of that country. All the propositions underwent discussion between the plenipotentiary of his Majesty, and the French minister; only the British minister informed the minister of France, that as to the Netherlands, his Majesty could, on no account, retract any part of his propositions, but that every thing else should be subject to modification. These offers, Sir, I maintain to have been extremely liberal in their principle, and more so, when we consider the application of it. We carried the principle of compensation to the fullest extent, when we offered to give up all that we had taken, reserving one subject only for consideration, which depended on a treaty, and which I shall presently mention; and we asked no more than what, by the strictest ties of justice and

honour, we were bound to demand. Let me appeal to every one present if this conduct was not fair, just, and reasonable; if it did not bespeak sincere intentions and an anxious wish on the part of his Majesty to procure peace, consistently with good faith and security to himself and his allies, and if it was not entitled to a candid reception from the enemy? As to the value of the French possessions which we offered to give up, it must be confessed that the same evils with which France has been afflicted have been extended to the colonial possessions; they have undoubtedly been much depreciated, much impoverished; but after all, they are of infinite importance to the commerce and marine of France. The valuable post of St. Domingo; the military and commercial advantages of Martinique; the peculiarly favourable military situation of St. Lucia; the importance of Tobago to this country; when we combine these, and place them in an united point of view, we have some reason to doubt whether there was not some degree of boldness on the part of his Majesty's ministers to make such overtures; we have some reason to suspect the wisdom of the measure, rather than to cavil at the insufficiency of the offer.

I come now more particularly to mention what relates to the Spanish part of St. Domingo, in the late negociation. By a former treaty with Spain, made at the peace of Utrecht, in the year 1713, Spain engages not to alienate any of her possessions in America and the West Indies, without the consent of Great Britain. Have we not then a right to take advantage of this circumstance, on the present occasion, and to hold out our consent to this alienation, as a part of the compensation offered on the part of this country? In what consists the right of the French to the Spanish parts of St. Domingo? Is it the right of possession? No! they never yet have been in possession. Is it then merely the right of title? No! for their title is derived from the alienation of the Spaniards, who had no right to transfer it without the consent of this country. But it may be said that this treaty is old and obsolete. On the contrary, having been kept sacred up to the year 1796, it has gained strength by a long prescription;

besides it has been recognized and confirmed at the end of every war since that time, and particularly so in the definitive treaty of 1783. It may be objected, however, and has indeed been urged on this occasion, that England herself has violated this treaty in the transaction of Pensacola and Florida; but this argument depends upon an obvious fallacy. The agreement with respect to the Spanish dominions in America and the West Indies was made between this country and Spain. Now, although the two parties to the agreement may, by consent at pleasure, modify their respective interests, it does not follow that either party can, without the consent, and to the disadvantage of the other, introduce the interests of third parties. Upon every view of this subject, then, I ask if we have not a fair and reasonable right to avail ourselves of the advantages arising to us from the treaty of Utrecht?

Sir, I think, that from the great extent of the subject, it will be unnecessary for me to trouble the house with any farther observation on that part of it; but I must request the attention of the house to the nature of the terms proposed with respect to the meditated peace between this country and her allies; and first with respect to Holland, a country which, although now hostile to us, I cannot help considering as having, at the commencement of the present war, been concerned in alliance with us in carrying it on, and connected in our interest by every tie of internal policy—a country which is now only opposed to us in consequence of the restraint imposed by the overbearing arms of France. However, Sir, notwithstanding Holland was our ally, and an ally, whose protection against the common enemy was one of the causes of our entering into the war; yet, as circumstances have occurred, which have compelled Holland to become the enemy of this country, I must, of necessity, treat her as such; I must consider her in the relation, in which she stands with respect to France, though at the same time I cannot bring myself to forget she was formerly an ally, whose friendship was attended with reciprocal advantages to herself and to this country. I am satisfied, if it were possible to replace Holland in the situation

in which she formerly stood, and restore her legitimate government, not nominally, but permanently and effectually, that such a restoration would undoubtedly redound to the advantage of this country. But as it is perhaps a question of too remote contingency to consider the advantage which we should acquire by the restoration of Holland to her former system, such an event, either nominally or really, being extremely unlikely under the present aspect of things, I shall therefore refrain from arguing the point. Now, Sir, as to the conduct pursued on the part of this country, with regard to her connexions with other powers, and supposing for the present that Holland may for a time remain subject to France, I may be allowed to assert that the terms proposed by this country, on behalf of her allies, were such as could only be dictated by a principle of moderation, of disinterestedness, and earnest desire for peace. This country having nothing to ask for herself, was induced to surrender a considerable part, nay, almost the whole of her acquisitions, for the purpose of inducing the French to give up to our allies that territory she has wrested from them.

The continental possessions which France had acquired from Holland, might perhaps be subjects of discussion in what manner they were best to be arranged at once for the interest of Holland, and of the allies. But these and the conquests made by this country must be considered, in the view of restitution, as merely an addition to the French power. We ought to consider that those possessions, with regard to which no relation was to be admitted, were to be retained, in order that they might not become acquisitions to the French government. In refusing to yield them up, we only refuse to put into the hands of the enemy the means of carrying into effect the deep laid schemes of ambition they have long cherished, and the plan they have conceived of undermining our Indian empire, and destroying our Indian commerce, by ceding out of our own hands, what may be deemed the bulwark of the wealth of this country, and the security of the Indian empire. These, indeed, were refused to be given up to our enemies; but every thing else which the valour and the arms

of this country had acquired, which was valuable, was proposed to be made matter of negociation. This, Sir, was the nature of the propositions made at the very first moment when the negociation was commenced: and I again submit to the final decision of the house, whether a proposition, including the restoration of every thing valuable which we had acquired, except that which we could not forego without manifest detriment to the most important interests of the country, was not founded in liberality and sincerity. Sir, I must beg leave to observe, that on this part of the subject I have been the more anxious to be explicit, because it is that part on which I lay the more particular stress, as tending to prove to the house, that every thing was done at the commencement, every thing distinctly stated, on which this country was willing to enter upon a negociation. I am the more desirous of impressing the house with this part of my argument, because I feel it material in order to enable them to form a determinate precise idea of the character and prominent features of the negociation itself. In return to the statements of compensation proposed by this country, the French government presented no *projet* of their own, they afforded no room for discussion, because they were actuated by motives very distant from conciliation.

This much I have thought it necessary to state, in vindication of the character of myself and colleagues, that the house may be enabled to see that we never lost sight of the idea of a peace advantageous for our allies, safe for Europe, and honourable to this country. With regard to any specific terms of peace, which it might be proper to adopt or refuse, I do not think it would be wise for the house to pronounce. This may still be considered as a dormant negociation, capable of being renewed; and it would be impolitic to give a pledge to any specific terms to which it might be impossible to adhere, and which can never be incurred without rashness. No man can be pledged to any particular terms, because in these he must be guided by a view of collateral circumstances, and a comparative statement of resources. All that I wish parliament to pronounce is, that they will add their testimony to the sincerity with which his Majesty

has endeavoured to restore peace to Europe, and their approbation of the steps which were employed for its attainment. But even after their rejection of every proposition that was advanced, after all the difficulties they started, after all the cavils they employed, after all the discouragements which they presented, when, at last, the French government had been compelled to open the discussion, the first thing that happens, after requiring a note containing specific proposals, is a captious demand to have it signed by Lord Malmesbury. This demand was complied with to deprive them of every pretence for breaking off the negociation, and immediately they call for an *ultimatum* in twenty-four hours. The impossibility of complying with such a demand is obvious. Was it possible to reconcile discordances, to smooth opposition, or pronounce good understanding in this manner? Does it come within the scope of the negociation? Is an *ultimatum*, which means that demand which is to come the nearest to the views of all parties, and to state the lowest terms which could be offered, thus to be made out at random, without knowing what the enemy would concede on their part, or what they would accept on ours? A proposal, drawn up in such a manner, without explanation, without information, could have no good effect. It is a demand contrary to all reason and to all principle. With such a demand, therefore, it was impossible to comply; and in consequence of this, Lord Malmesbury received orders to quit Paris in forty-eight hours, and the territories of the republic as soon as possible.

Perhaps, however, I shall be told, that the negociation is not broken off, and that the French government have pointed out a new basis upon which they are still willing to proceed. There are two things upon this subject not unworthy of consideration. The time at which they propose this new basis, and what sort of basis it is that they propose. After having approved and acted upon the basis proposed by his Majesty's government: after having acknowledged, and, to all appearance, cordially acquiesced in it, as the ground of negociation; after having demanded an *ultimatum* at the very commencement of this negociation, and be-

fore any discussion had taken place, to be delivered in to the directory, in the space of twenty-four hours; and after dismissing the ambassador of the king with every mark of ignominy and insult, they propose a new basis, by which the negociation is to be carried on by means of couriers. And what is the reason they assign for this new basis? Because Lord Malmesbury acted in a manner purely passive, and because he could assent to nothing without dispatching couriers to obtain the sanction of his court. Here one cannot help remarking the studied perverseness of the temper of the French government. When a courier was dispatched to Paris, at the instance of the minister of a neutral power, in order to get a passport from the French government, it was denied. A courier could not even obtain a passport, though the application was made to the executive directory through the medium of the Danish minister. The request of the Danish minister was not enough: nothing could satisfy them but a British minister. Well, a British minister was sent. At the commencement of the negociation he had occasion frequently to send dispatches to his court, because it is very well known that there are a great number of difficulties which attend the opening of every negociation, and because Lord Malmesbury had been sent to Paris before the preliminaries, which are usually settled by means of couriers, were arranged. While these preliminaries were in a course of settling, Lord Malmesbury's presence was barely endured, and the frequent dispatches of his couriers were subjects of animadversion; but no sooner were these preliminaries settled, and the British minister delivered in a *projet*, when there was less necessity for dispatching couriers, when the period for discussion was arrived, when the personal presence of an ambassador was particularly necessary, and when the King's ministers announced to the French government that he was prepared to enter into discussion upon the official memorials containing his *projet*, than he was ordered to quit Paris, and leave the negociation to be carried on by means of couriers. Such is the precise form, and it was impossible to devise a better, in which a studied

insult, refined and matured by the French directory, was offered to his Britannic Majesty.

I now come to state the broad plain ground on which the question rests, as far as the terms, upon which we are invited to treat on this new basis, are concerned. After having started a variety of captious objections at the opening of the negociation, after the preliminaries were with much difficulty adjusted, after an *ultimatum* was demanded, almost before discussion had commenced, after the king's minister was ordered, in the most insulting manner, to leave the territories of France, after a retraction by the executive directory of the original basis of negociation, and the substitution of a new one in its place, they demand, not as an *ultimatum*, but as a preliminary, to be permitted to retain all those territories of which the chance of war has given them a temporary possession, and respecting which they have thought proper, contrary to every principle of equity and the received laws of nations, to pass a constitutional law, declaring, as they interpret it, that they shall not be alienated from the republic. Now whether this be the principle of their constitution or not, upon which I shall afterwards have occasion to make some observations, it was at least naturally to be supposed that the principle had been virtually set aside when the former basis of negociation was recognized by the French directory; for it must have been a strange admission of the principle of reciprocal compensations indeed, if they were obliged by the rules of their constitution to retain all those conquests which we were most bound in duty and in honour to insist upon their giving up, (not by any mystery of a new constitution, which is little known, and even among those who know it of doubtful interpretation, but by public and known engagements) and if they were under the same constitutional necessity, which they certainly are, of demanding the restitution of those colonies formerly in their possession, but which they have lost in the course of the war. Notwithstanding, however, their disavowal of this principle in the admission of the former basis of the negociation, it is now alleged as a ground for the preten-

sion, that they are entitled, as a matter of right, to demand from this country, not as an *ultimatum*, but as a preliminary to the discussion of any articles of treaty, that we shall make no proposals inconsistent with the laws and constitution of France. I know of no law of nations which can in the remotest degree countenance such a perverse and monstrous claim. The annexation of territory to any state, by the government of that state, during the continuance of the war in which they have been acquired, can never confer a claim which supersedes the treaties of their powers, and the known and public obligations of the different nations of Europe. It is impossible in the nature of things, that the separate act of a separate government can operate to the dissolution of the ties subsisting between other governments, and to the abrogation of treaties previously concluded: and yet this is the pretension to which the French government lay claim, and the acknowledgment of which they hold out, not as an *ultimatum*, but as a preliminary of negociation, to the king of Great Britain and his allies. In my opinion, there is no principle of the law of nations clearer than this, that when in the course of war any nation acquires new possessions, such nation has only temporary right to them, and they do not become property till the end of the war. This principle is incontrovertible, and founded upon the nature of things. For, supposing possessions thus acquired to be immediately annexed to the territory of the state by which the conquest was made, and that the conqueror was to insist upon retaining them, because he had passed a law that they should not be alienated, might not the neighbouring powers, or even the hostile power, ask—Who gave you a right to pass this law? What have we to do with the regulations of your municipal law? Or, what authority have you, as a separate state, by any annexation of territory to your dominions, to cancel existing treaties, and to destroy the equilibrium established among nations? Were this pretension to be tolerated, it would be a source of eternal hostility, and a perpetual bar to negociation between the contending

parties; because the pretensions of the one would be totally irreconcileable with those of the other.

This pretension in the instance of France has been as inconsistent in its operations as it was unfounded in its origin. The possessions which they have lost in the West Indies in the course of the war, they made independent republics; and what is still more singular, Tobago, which they have lost in the war, and which is retained by British arms, is a part of indivisible France. I should not be surprised to hear that Ireland, in consequence of the rumour which has been circulated of their intention to attempt an invasion upon that country, is constitutionally annexed to the territories of the republic, or even that the city of Westminster is a part of indivisible France. There is a distinction, no doubt, between the Netherlands and the West India islands, but it whimsically happens that this principle of law, that this constitutional pretension, is least applicable to those possessions upon which it is held out as operating by the French government, and that the Austrian Netherlands, even by the letter of their own constitution, ought to be exempted from its operation. I own I am little qualified to read a lecture upon the French constitution, and perhaps I shall be accused, in my interpretation of it, of pretending to understand it better than they do themselves. Here I must remind my accusers, however, that even M. Delacroix, that great master of the law of nations, allows that, on this point, the constitution is not perfectly clear, and gives that particular interpretation of it upon the authority of the best publicists. I again repeat it—that, in discussing the terms of a treaty with France, I am not obliged to know either her constitution or her laws, because it was unreasonable for her to advance a pretension upon a foundation inconsistent with the received law of nations and the established nature of things. But it will demonstrate their insincerity and the shallowness of the subterfuges to which they have been obliged to have recourse, if I can shew that no such law is in existence, and that their constitution leaves the government entirely at liberty to dispose of the pos-

sessions which they have acquired in war, in any way they may think proper. I have looked through this voluminous code [holding a copy of the constitution in his hand], and I think it may be considered as an instance that a constitution upon paper, digesting and regulating the conduct of municipal jurisprudence as well as of foreign relations, does not lead to the best application of the true principles of political economy. In the copy of their constitution all I find upon the subject is a declaration that France is one and indivisible, which is followed by a long list of departments. And here I would recommend it to gentlemen to read the report upon which this decree was founded, in which they will find that it was passed for the avowed purpose of obtaining for France an indisputable ascendant in Europe, and of suppressing the trade and commerce of rival nations. Overlooking, however, the principle of the decree, if it was found inapplicable to the possessions of the French in the East and West Indies, which they had previous to the war, it was certainly much more inapplicable to the Austrian Netherlands, of which they have got possession in the course of the war; and, therefore, the government, in holding out the principle as operating upon the latter, and not to the former, apply it to that part of their territory to which it is least applicable.

If we look at the provisions under the next title, *respecting relations with foreign powers*, the argument against the existence of any such principle in their constitution is confirmed: for we find the executive government is there vested with the full power of treating, but all their treaties must be ratified by the legislative bodies, with the singular exception of secret articles, which it is in the power of the directory to put in execution without being ratified, a proof that they are authorized by the constitution to alienate territories belonging to the republic. Allowing, however, that it is a principle of their constitution, is it an evil without a remedy? No. M. Delacroix confesses that it may be remedied, but not without the inconvenience of calling the primary assemblies. And are we then, after all the exertions

that we have made in order to effect the object of general pacification, and after being baffled in all our efforts by the stubborn pride and persevering obstinacy of the French government, after our propositions have been slighted, and our ambassador insulted, are we now to consent to sacrifice our engagements, and to violate our treaties, because, forsooth, it would be attended with some inconvenience for them to call their primary assemblies, in order to cancel a law which is incompatible with the principle of fair negociation? Shall we forget our own honour, our own dignity, and our own duty, so far, as to acquiesce in a principle as a preliminary to negociation, intolerable in its tendency, unfounded in fact, inconsistent with the nature of things, and inadmissible by the law of nations?

But this is not all the sacrifice they demand. This is not all the degradation to which they would have us submit. You must also engage, and as a preliminary too, to make no propositions which are contrary to the laws of the constitution, and the *treaties* which bind the republic. Here they introduce a new and extraordinary clause, imposing a restriction still more absurd and unreasonable than the other. The republic of France may have made secret treaties which we know nothing about, and yet that government expects that we are not to permit our propositions to interfere with these treaties. In the former instance we had a text upon which to comment, but here we are in the state of those diviners who were left to guess at the dreams which they were called upon to interpret. How is it possible for this country to know what secret articles there may be in the treaty between France and Holland? How can we know what the Dutch may have ceded to France, or whether France may not have an oath in heaven never to give up the territories ceded to her by Holland? Who can know but her treaty with Spain contains some secret article guaranteeing to the latter the restitution of Gibraltar, or some important possession now belonging to his Majesty? And how can I know whether the performance of all these engagements may not be included under the pretension which the French government now holds out?

How is it possible for me to sound where no line can fathom? And even after you have acceded to these preliminaries, in what situation do you stand? After accepting of terms of which you are entirely ignorant, and giving up all that it is of importance for you to keep, you at last arrive at a discussion of the government which France may chuse to give to Italy, and of the fate which she may be pleased to assign to Germany. In fact, the question is not, how much you will give for peace, but how much disgrace you will suffer at the outset, how much degradation you will submit to as a preliminary? In these circumstances, then, are we to persevere in the war with a spirit and energy worthy of the British name and of the British character? Or are we, by sending courters to Paris, to prostrate ourselves at the feet of a stubborn and supercilious government, to do what they require, and to submit to whatever they may impose? I hope there is not a hand in his Majesty's councils that would sign the proposals, that there is not a heart in this house that would sanction the measure, and that there is not an individual in the British dominions who would act as the courier.

Mr. Pitt concluded with moving,

"That an humble address be presented to his Majesty, to assure his Majesty, that that house also felt the utmost concern that his Majesty's earnest endeavours to effect the restoration of peace had been unhappily frustrated, and that the negociation, in which he had been happily engaged, had been abruptly broken off by the peremptory refusal of the French government to treat, except upon a basis evidently inadmissible, and by their having, in consequence, required his Majesty's plenipotentiary to quit Paris within forty-eight hours.

"To thank his Majesty for having directed the several memorials and papers which had been exchanged in the course of the late discussion, and the account transmitted to his Majesty of its final result, to be laid before the house.

"That they were perfectly satisfied, from the perusal of these papers, that his Majesty's conduct had been guided by a sincere

desire to effect the restoration of peace, on principles suited to the relative situation of the belligerent powers, and essential for the permanent interests of his Majesty's kingdoms, and the general security of Europe: whilst his enemies had advanced pretensions at once inconsistent with those objects, unsupported even on the grounds on which they were professed to rest, and repugnant both to the system established by repeated treaties; and to the principles and practice which had hitherto regulated the intercourse of independent nations.

"To assure his Majesty, that, under the protection of Providence, he might place the fullest reliance on the wisdom and firmness of his parliament, on the tried valour of his forces by sea and land, and on the zeal, public spirit, and resources, of his kingdoms, for vigorous and effectual support in the prosecution of a contest, which it did not depend on his Majesty to terminate, and which involved in it the security and permanent interests of this country and of Europe."

The House divided on an amendment moved by Mr. Fox, censuring the conduct of ministers in the negociation:

For the amendment 37
Against it 212

The address was then agreed to.

March 13, 1797.

On a motion by Mr. Harrison, "That the extent of the supplies voted to Government, since the commencement of the present war, having caused so heavy an increase of taxes, it is the duty of this House to inquire whether some relief to the burdens of the people, or provision for further expense, may not be obtained by the reduction of useless places, sinecure offices, exorbitant fees, and other modes of retrenchment in the expenditure of the public money,"

Mr. Pitt spoke to the following effect:

Sir—Though the honourable mover, and the noble lord * who seconded the motion, have thought proper to enter into considerations, which so far from exactly applying to the subject before the house, go a very great extent beyond it, it is not my intention to enter minutely into objects so completetly unconnected with the present motion, and which we may have many opportunities of discussing. It seems to me unnecessary to trouble the house with any allusions either to the origin, or conduct of the present war; or to take a review, or enter into a justification of the great and various questions which have been frequently agitated here. The noble lord has in his speech thought fit to condemn the measures adopted by the last parliament, for the preservation of the internal tranquillity of the kingdom, and the security of the state. But, Sir, the precautionary measures to which he has adverted were not, as he has been pleased to declare, retrenchments of the constitution, but essential safeguards against lawless attacks levelled at the British constitution by a faction, which, though small, was acting with the common enemy, and was openly proceeding not on British, but on French principles. The safety of the state at that time depended on the wise and just precautions which it was found necessary to take; and though I feel that any review of these transactions is foreign to the question on which we are called to decide; yet I trust I may be allowed to notice the manner in which the noble lord has referred to those measures which were calculated to oppose any check to the progress of French principles. He has, Sir, taken great pains to reprobate the proceedings of parliament on that momentous occasion, and the speech which he has delivered in support of his honourable friend's motion relates so little to the subject of it, that it appears to have been prepared for another purpose, of which notice has been already given. [Mr. Pitt alluded to Mr. Fox's notice of moving for the repeal of the treason and sedition bills.] But as these measures have been fully discussed and resolved by parliament, I cannot, until this house

* Lord William Russell.

feels convinced of their error, suppose that they have agreed to improper proceedings. While their resolutions on those subjects stand on record, I am authorized in assuming, that they have acted on principles of public order against principles of anarchy and confusion; that they have supported the cause of true liberty against the ravages of licentiousness; that they have protected religion and morality against the desperate attempts of destructive innovation, and that they have preserved our constitution inviolate from the bold and daring attacks of a faction acting in concert with the common enemy of freedom, and of public and private happiness. So far, Sir, I conceive I have an undisputed right to argue on the solemn decision of this house. With respect to the manner in which the honourable gentleman has opened his motion, I am led to observe, that he has not entered into any specific grounds to support it. He has confined himself to very general statements, and he seems to have reserved himself for a particular detail on some other opportunity.

The honourable gentleman appears, from the words of his motion, to have two different objects in view. The first relates to making retrenchments, and correcting profusion in the established offices of government, and in sinecure places and pensions. The second has for its object an inquiry into the state of the national expenditure, and proposes a check on the expenses of the state. This, it is needless for me to urge, is comprehended in a resolution which has already passed this house, to inquire into the finances of the country, and to consider of the most practicable means for obtaining a diminution of the public expenditure. The honourable gentleman means to include in the investigation which he proposes, subjects of the most extensive and complicated nature. He wishes to embrace all the ordinary and extraordinary expenses of the different branches of government. He extends his inquiry into the disbursements of the army, navy, and every public establishment. I am ready to admit, that as far as this proposition goes, it forms a subject worthy the consideration of the house; and the magnitude of it appears to be such, that no man can say what will

be the effect of it, or to what particular measures it may lead. Yet, Sir, the honourable gentleman, bringing before the house considerations of such extensive views, and of such high importance, adopts a very singular mode of proceeding. He does not think proper to offer matters so momentous and complicated in their relations in a direct manner to parliamentary discussion, but states them as the objects of a collateral inquiry, and introduces them immediately after his motion for retrenchment in the offices of government. But certainly the honourable gentleman will not deny that there is an extreme difference between both objects: for the check which he proposes on the public expenses very much exceeds in importance that reform which he wishes should take place in the establishment and salaries of public offices. The distinction between these two objects being so evident, as the latter does not form any part whatever of the proposition formerly submitted to the house by the honourable gentleman, nor of the notice which he gave of his motion of this night, I must consider the manner of introducing it not only irregular, but inadequate to the magnitude of the inquiry which he proposes to establish. I also think it necessary to remind gentlemen, that the objects which it comprehends, form the grounds of my motion for the appointment of the committee which has been this night chosen by ballot. I stated in general terms, previous to my bringing forward that motion, the various points to which the attention of the committee was to be directed; but I could not, until I had appointed that committee, proceed to offer, in a specific manner, each of these points. I therefore only stated, that it was my wish and desire to move, as an instruction to the committee, that after inquiring into, and ascertaining the whole state of the finances of the country; after reviewing the whole amount of the debt which had been incurred during the war; after investigating the provision which had been made to meet it; after considering the probable amount of the total expense of public service for the whole of the year 1797, and the sums now applicable for defraying it;—I say, Sir, after taking these steps, it was also

my intention to move that further instruction should be given to the committee to exercise a full power in forming and digesting a plan for controlling the public expenditure, and to inquire into, and report upon, the best and most practicable means for obtaining a diminution thereof. I therefore, Sir, am not a little surprised, after stating these measures in general terms—measures which I contend have been sanctioned by the unanimous concurrence of the house, in consequence of the appointment of the committee for the professed and acknowledged consideration of those very objects, that the honourable gentleman should now bring forward a motion to the same end, and without any previous notice whatever. The instruction for the committee, the nature of which I had thus before stated in general terms, I held in my hand ready to move, when the honourable gentleman brought forward his motion; for I certainly did not think any new proposition on the same subject could be urged, after an express declaration of my desire that the most speedy and effectual measures should be taken, which went to retrench the great and heavy expenses of war, and were of infinitely superior magnitude to any diminution that might be expected in the salaries of the public offices.

Without entering at this moment into a particular discussion, whether there exist any specific grounds to authorize the house to proceed to a reduction of useless offices, or to a retrenchment of profuse salaries, I can only say, that it is not my wish to oppose an inquiry to that effect. But I feel I shall not do my duty to the house and the public, if I were to agree to any other examination than that which I have proposed, and which has received the concurrence of the house. The honourable gentleman has, however, neglected many important, and, indeed, necessary considerations in suggesting his motion. He seems, in the first place, to have been unmindful that the limits of the proposed reduction should be expressly declared. He next forgets, that the steps which have been already taken to effect the same end, should be submitted to the consideration of parliament, as a guide to direct their measures; and above

all, that no ill-founded hope may be raised without fully looking into the subject on which the decision is to be formed. If it can appear that retrenchment, both in the number and expense of public offices, is calculated to promote the public service, I am convinced there is no man in this house that will oppose it. But the question now before us is, what are the specific grounds on which the honourable gentleman brings forward his motion? It is incumbent on him to point out, in a decisive manner, abuses which are said to exist in the performance of duties, or in payments for services which are not done for the public. I know, Sir, how very easy it is to give credit out of doors to the reports of abuses in sinecure places and pensions; but I really believe it is a subject as much mistaken as any other of a public nature. I therefore think, in whatever way the inquiry may terminate, that it will not be of much utility. If it can be shewn that there are strong grounds for correcting abuses, much may be gained for the public good; but if, on the contrary, it shall appear that there are no specific grounds to warrant a strong measure of that kind, and that the idea of the prevalence of abuses in the offices of the state is erroneous, much also is gained by removing an opinion, which might otherwise diminish the national confidence. Offices of very different descriptions come within the honourable gentleman's motion: the first which present themselves to notice are absolutely necessary, and in respect to them the inquiry fairly stated is, whether or no the number of offices is more than the different duties of them require; and secondly, whether the reward for the exercise of the various talents and industry necessary for the due execution of them is too great? It might also form a most important consideration, whether the same talents, the same diligence, and perseverance, at present employed in the performance of the duties annexed to these offices, might not be rewarded in an equal or superior manner, were they applied to and exerted in the ordinary pursuits of life? I have, Sir, no hesitation in saying, that it is an unjust idea to imagine, that the abilities and labour devoted to the

service of the public should not be paid as well, and to the full as liberally by the public, as those which are applied in private life to the interest of individuals, and which are rewarded by individual compensation. Next to the offices which I have noticed, and which must be viewed in a necessary light, I come to those which relate to state duties. Many of them are attended with considerable expense for the maintenance of the relative duty they should hold to the high ranks in life of those, near whom they are placed. If we look into the various offices connected with the army, the navy, and the revenue, we shall find that the wages they receive are not higher than those they might earn by an equal exertion in private life, from individuals; and, therefore, Sir, the real state of the question appears to be, whether they are paid in a larger way by the public, than they would be by particular persons, for the performance of equal services. I only state this, that gentlemen may turn it in their minds, and not be induced to take up the matter in a general view. There are unquestionably offices of another description—of less business and with fewer duties attached to them; but I think it necessary to observe, that they arise out of our ancient manners, and are, in fact, the remnants of former times, attached to the splendour of Majesty, and attendant on the dignity of monarchy. I am not inclined to say what should be the exact sum for duties of this kind. I only maintain, that such offices have ever existed; and such has been the custom of all countries which have been governed by monarchs. This custom has been interwoven in our constitution, and forms an appendage to our mixed government; not for the display of idle parade; not for the loose gratification of idle vanity, but sanctioned by the authority of our ancestors, and continued for the dignified consistency of appearance in the king of a great and free people. Having noticed this branch of public duties, I shall only observe, that though not included in the first class, they should notwithstanding be considered as connected with your constitution of mixed monarchy. Another description of offices is of a more invidious nature than any I

have yet mentioned. I allude to sinecure places, which, notwithstanding the ridicule and severity with which they may be commented on by some gentlemen, are capable of being looked at with the eye of reason. I shall, Sir, shortly state the principles on which they stand. They stand on the invariable custom of this country; they are recognized by the solemn decisions of parliament. It will not, I trust, be denied, that the fair principle of honourable remuneration has ever been held a sacred consideration. It will not, I hope, be contested, that a provision and retreat for a life devoted to the public service, has ever been deemed a just and irresistible motive for conferring permanent rewards.

The question then presents itself, whether, at the instant when one common sweep is designed, to remove all offices in which actual duty is not performed, remuneration for actions done in the service of the state is a wise, a just, and an useful principle? Another inquiry will naturally arise, and that is, whether the mode in which they are distributed is more liable to abuse than any other? In the consideration of this question, I will not confidently maintain that the first principle of remuneration may not sometimes be misapplied, as it frequently depends on chance, discretion, and various causes, which it is unnecessary for me to enumerate. It may also be objected, that it cannot be ascertained by a precise rule how to reward precise merit. But then, Sir, I say, can any other method more efficacious, more independent of abuses, and less liable to errors, be adopted? Can any other mode be pointed out in which chance and discretion are to be completely laid aside? Suppose, Sir, for a moment, that even an application to parliament should be made the constitutional way of bestowing this kind of rewards; can it be imagined that such a proceeding would produce less complaint and murmurs than the present way in which they are conferred? I beg, therefore, gentlemen will not conclude, because there may be some offices connected with government which it may be wise to reform, that all are indiscriminately to be wiped away. I should imagine, that a correct

and particular statement ought to be made of useless offices, and excessive salaries; that specific objections should be precisely stated, and thus, by pursuing an authentic detail, the house might be enabled to entertain a probability of the saving which could be made for the country. But, Sir, if without resorting to any of these indispensable measures, if without establishing a proper clue, which in the course of inquiry would lead to a just conclusion, you were to precipitate this business, I must contend, that instead of striving to meet the popular opinion, instead of serving the essential interests of the nation, you would, on the contrary, act in opposition to both, and even excite general discontent. In such a case, the house would not do justice to themselves, nor to their constituents. This is not, however, the first time that you have been called on to interfere in similar considerations. The honourable gentleman brought forward, in the last parliament, a resolution of the same nature which he has this night proposed; and the event of it is fresh in every person's recollection. In a former parliament, a plan, which contained a particular detail, which furnished a full statement of the grounds of the application, and which went to a general economical reform, was brought forward by a right honourable gentleman*, who is no longer a member of this house; yet parliament, at that period, and in an hour of confessed necessity, with every possible authority before them, with every document which a well-digested and a judiciously executed plan could furnish, with the report of the commissioners invested with powers to examine into the various branches comprehended in the proposed reform—I say, Sir, parliament, with all these authorities before them, which the most exalted talents, or the most minute investigation, could supply, proceeded in a very cautious and limited manner. They abolished some offices, and reduced the value of others; but they did not allow themselves to extend their reform beyond a prudential and constitutional line of conduct; and what cannot

* Mr. Burke.

be too closely attended to, they effected no change nor modification whatever, without the aid of incontrovertible evidence, and the assistance of positive fact. They wisely lopped off whatever was proved to be superfluous, and they made reductions to the amount of many thousand pounds. To them were added savings by the commissioners of his Majesty's treasury, which were confirmed by the vote of parliament. But when they came to investigate the offices held under the exchequer, and proceeded to take into their consideration the nature of the tenure by which sinecure places were held, they did not think fit entirely to lop them off. The tellers of the exchequer, and several other offices, were retained and recognized by the resolution of parliament as necessary to be continued. Such was the opinion of the right honourable gentleman who proposed the reform, and such were the sentiments even of some gentlemen whom I now see over against me. A considerable reduction was then also effected in different offices of the customs, while some were entirely dropped; and, with respect to subordinate employments, large additional savings were made. I have now to observe, that, in all these retrenchments, the house proceeded on the general and acknowledged principle of remuneration for public services which I have already stated; and of such weight was that principle, that even Mr. Burke himself, though animated with the most enthusiastic zeal to carry his plan into execution, was on every occasion ready to recognize not only the wisdom, but the necessity of adopting it. I maintain, Sir, that sinecure offices are given in the nature of a freehold tenure. Parliament has expressly said, they will respect them as freehold property: and if, in answer to this solemn declaration, it is urged, that parliament may rescind their former resolutions, I say they may, by a parity of reasoning, destroy every kind of property in the country. But to dwell any longer on this kind of argument would be too absurd to merit attention; and I have only to observe, that we ought not to lose sight, even for an instant, of those grand principles

which lead to, and are inseparable from, the administration of public justice. I repeat, Sir, it is my sincere and earnest wish, that the house should ascertain the particular offices which may be paid beyond the duties annexed to them, and beyond the trust and responsibility which attach to them. But until that great and necessary measure takes place, you cannot proceed to retrench or to lop off.

I must once more entreat the attention of the house to the nature of the honourable gentleman's motion, and to the time in which it is proposed. The tendency of it is completely included in the instruction of which I have already given a general statement, and which I have given notice I should move for the direction of the committee, and it is brought forward at the very moment when a general investigation is set on foot with respect to the whole finance of the country, and with a view of ascertaining a plan for controlling the public expenditure. If therefore, Sir, it should be the opinion of the house to refer to the committee the subject of the honourable gentleman's motion, as part of the general inquiry with which it was intended they should be entrusted, it would be an easy matter, if the words of the instruction were thought too general, to introduce particular terms that might peculiarly specify it.

On these grounds I oppose the motion, convinced as I am, that were I to agree to it, the public could derive no benefit from it, and that I myself should become a party in the disappointment, and in the delusion of the people: I therefore move the previous question.

The previous question was carried,

Ayes 169
Noes 77

March 23, 1797.

MR. FOX, in pursuance of a previous notice, this day submitted to the House the following resolution:

"That an humble address be presented to his Majesty, that his Majesty will be graciously pleased to take into his royal consideration the disturbed state of his kingdom of Ireland, and to adopt such healing and lenient measures as may appear to his Majesty's wisdom best calculated to restore tranquillity, and to conciliate the affections of all descriptions of his Majesty's subjects in that kingdom to his Majesty's person and government."

The motion being seconded by Sir Francis Burdett, MR. PITT rose:

Sir—However generally the terms of the motion of the right honourable gentlemen are couched, for an address to his Majesty, it is utterly impossible for any man to form his judgment on the merits of it, unless by proceeding to separate it from the various and collateral topics which he has thought proper to introduce, and without which the proposed address would, in reality, be indistinct and unnecessary. He has, in the early part of his speech, developed a subject to which I most seriously desire to call the attention of the house. The right honourable gentleman, who has made a speech on the whole system of the Irish legislature, who has argued at large upon the principles and frame of it, who has considered in a very ample manner its aptitude to make laws, and who has gone at length into the disposition of the people, with respect to the practical effect of these laws, began by reminding us, when he stated to the house the discontents now existing in Ireland, that it was necessary to have recourse to that period when we recognized and fully established the complete independence of the Irish legislature, as it might be known whether we gave that independence as a boon or a right —whether that measure was a concession to Ireland. There is one certain point in which we must all coincide by having recourse to that period, and the truth of which the right honourable gentleman himself cannot controvert—that whether the establishment of the independence of Ireland was a concession or a

recognition on our part, it was putting Ireland in the absolute possession of independence in point of fact. He had himself, on former occasions, fully admitted and acknowledged that important truth, and to oppose it would tend to shake the authority of the parliament of Great Britain.

But, Sir, I beg leave to ask in what parliament of Ireland was it that he recognized the independence of the legislature of that country, and the necessity of which he then urged with so much force? Was it one formed on a more extensive frame than that which now exists? Did it include more persons attached to the Roman catholic interest of Ireland than it does now, or was it more calculated to give satisfaction at a time when concessions were not made in their favour, than now when such measures have actually taken place? Yet that very parliament, which existed at the period to which the right honourable gentleman has thought proper to have recourse, was conceived to be the national source of the most valuable blessings to Ireland. Surely he did not mean to say that, when he himself pressed forward in establishing the independence of Ireland, he was then only putting the people of that country in possession of a delusion, and that the legislature was incapable of conveying to the inhabitants of the country the enjoyment of practical liberty. The right honourable gentleman will not therefore now maintain, that, in the year 1782, he considered the parliament of Ireland so extremely defective in its frame and principles, that the nation could receive no essential benefit from the line of conduct then pursued by it; and if he will not say that, (and I am perfectly convinced he cannot say what would necessarily expose him to the charge of the most glaring inconsistency,) I am naturally led to inquire upon what ground it now happens, that we are to come this day to vote an address for an alteration in the frame of that parliament, the superintendance of which we have entirely put out of our control by the recommendation of the right honourable gentleman, and the independence of which we have unequivocally acknowledged? By what means will he make it appear, that, having renounced all power over the legislature of

Ireland, having formally abdicated the privilege which might have once existed, of enforcing any internal regulation in that country, having solemnly divested ourselves of all right, of whatever nature that right may have been, to make laws in any respect for Ireland; I say, Sir, by what particular means will he undertake to make it appear that it now remains for us to declare, what laws shall affect that country, and to dictate the precise modifications which he proposes to take place in the fixed principles of the legislature itself? In the year 1782, having given to Ireland a distinct and independent legislature, having, with every solid testimony of good faith, laid aside all pretensions to interference in the internal concerns of the nation, can any person now point out a subject to which Ireland should look with such well founded jealousy, as the subject presented to the consideration of the house by the right honourable gentleman's motion? I am ready to admit, that the address, proposed as it is, does not exactly say so; but, Sir, it conveys too much by implication, not to call for the attention of the house in a serious manner. Let us for a moment compare it with the speech of the mover, and if we proceed upon that just and reasonable ground, to which the right honourable gentleman himself can have no objection, as his speech forms the ground-work of his motion, it will in that case be found to convey what ought not to be stated in general terms, but expressed clearly and fairly.

The motion submitted to the house is, Sir, if I recollect right, for an address to his Majesty, that he will be pleased to take into his gracious consideration the present disturbed state of Ireland, and to adopt such healing and lenient measures as may restore it to tranquillity. But what can be the effect of such an address? Will it be maintained that the situation of Ireland has not been the frequent subject of his Majesty's thoughts? Can it with the shadow of propriety be urged, that the royal mind has been at any time exempt from those considerations which may best promote the happiness of his people? What then can be the object of the address? It proposes to his Majesty the propriety of adopting measures for the restoration of the tranquillity of his

subjects of Ireland. But such, Sir, must be his Majesty's disposition: and to what purpose will our advice tend? No man can presume to say, that such is not the firm desire, as it most undoubtedly is the interest, of the executive government. During what part of his Majesty's reign has there appeared any mark of neglect to the interests of the people of Ireland? On the contrary, Sir, the most solid testimonies have been given of the sincerity of his intentions to promote the happiness of that country, not by promises, not by declarations, but by deeds and acts which have been received with grateful satisfaction by the whole nation. The most minute attention has been paid to the commerce, to the agriculture, to the manufactures of the country; and what was at the time considered as the most valuable measure, the independence of the legislature was recognized beyond a possibility of doubt. The whole has been one continued succession of concessions, and to such an extent, that during the present reign, they have exceeded all the preceding ones put together since the revolution.

But, Sir, if further concessions are demanded, if the object of the address consists in soliciting these concessions, I must contend, that while it does not precisely point out the particular measures, which are to be adopted, it is, in the general state in which it now stands, nugatory and superfluous. If, on the other hand, the address is compared with the right honourable gentleman's speech, which indeed must be viewed as the chief ground of the motion, I maintain that it would be absurd and impossible to express propositions any way conformable to the sentiments delivered in the course of that speech. In the first place, let us consider them politically. If they mean, that the lord lieutenant of Ireland is accountable for any misconduct during his administration of public affairs there, as the servant of the crown, and it shall be urged that the control of abuses of that kind remains with this country, I answer to that—granted. If in another point of view they go, as was in a certain degree, conveyed by the honourable baronet who seconded the motion, to arraign his Majesty's ministers for gross errors and crimes

committed in the government of Ireland, and to bring them to trial, I again answer—granted. But, if they are calculated to express and recommend measures which are not within the province of the executive government of Ireland, it is but fair and also necessary to ask, are these measures so recommended to be carried into execution by his Majesty, who is only a part of the legislative authority of Ireland, and what must seem still more extraordinary, are they to be so adopted by the desire of the parliament of Great Britain? I beg leave to demand, whether his Majesty is not bound to act in what concerns the internal regulation of Ireland, in consequence of the advice of the legislature of that country? Our assenting to the address would therefore be highly unconstitutional with respect to Ireland, and we could not for a moment entertain such an idea, without being guilty of an unjustifiable interference in the duties of the legislative and executive government of that nation. Such, Sir, is the real ground on which I oppose the address.

There certainly have been many other collateral topics brought forward, with which the right honourable gentleman has judged it proper to embellish his speech, but which do not apply to the question, and the discussion of which may do much mischief, without producing one single advantage. I will not, therefore enter into a review of all the various statements and arguments that have been used, nor will I declare whether the right honourable gentleman's assertions are right or wrong; but I will leave it to the justice and to the candour of the house to decide, whether any one point he has this night proposed, can be carried into effect, by any other means than by the voice of the Irish legislature? I must also observe, that he has, in the course of his speech, gone into a long historical narrative, and has attempted to shew, that the Irish legislature is so framed as not to be adequate to perform its functions for the practical happiness of the people; that the principles on which it acts are radically defective, and that while it remains in its present state, the nation, or at least the majority of the nation, cannot enjoy the essential blessings of a free constitution. In answer to this, Sir, I must

beg leave to direct the attention of the house to the great and important consideration, that the parliament of this country has completely recognized, and solemnly established the independence of that of the kingdom of Ireland, which is as entirely distinct and as incapable of being controlled by us, as we are independent of them. Yet the right honourable gentleman proposes an interference in the internal concerns of those who now have as much right to dictate to us, as we can possibly have to prescribe rules of conduct to them. Does it, Sir, become us now to say, that they are not qualified to act for the good of the people of Ireland, and that they are not entitled to the confidence of their constituents?—We who told the same people upwards of fourteen years ago, that they were completely adequate to promote the public happiness, that they were framed to secure the prosperity of the country, and what cannot be too often stated, that they were unchecked by any external control to deliberate and decide on the great business of legislation! If we speak thus to that parliament, (and such must be our language, if we give our assent to the address moved this night) I confess, Sir, it does appear to me the most extraordinary and singular line of conduct that can be adopted by one independent parliament against another independent parliament.

But allowing, for the mere sake of argument, that we are authorised to dictate in the manner proposed by the honourable gentleman, is it reasonable that we should proceed in the way he has pointed out on the bare suggestions which he has stated to the house? Should we, supported by assertions alone, assume the power, which by his motion he seems to suppose we possess, of watching over, and superintending the parliament of Ireland? With regard to what may be termed the practical part of the right honourable gentleman's speech, though it is very far from my wish to enter into a discussion of the various topics contained in it, yet I only follow him to shew, that, by agreeing to his proposition, however you disguise it by any specious name, however you gloss it over by any artful expression, you do nothing less than attempt directly to control the legitimate au-

thority of the parliament of another country, and to trespass on the acknowledged rights of another distinct legislative power. But, taking the honourable gentleman's arguments in a different point of view—assuming for a moment that he has made out his case in an incontrovertible manner, and that he has fully proved to our satisfaction that the parliament of Ireland was, in the year 1782, in every respect competent to perform its functions, and is at this time directly the reverse, I wish to know what is the practical conclusion he draws from my admission; and in what manner does he propose to remove the evil which I thus suppose he has clearly made out? What remedy, Sir, does he attempt to point out? Does he give us a single idea to guide us in the execution of the task which he wishes to impose on us? It is our duty to inquire what the principles are on which he invites us to proceed; and what the precise limits are, within which the subject is to be confined. With respect to these questions—and I trust every gentleman will readily allow them to be questions, not only of great importance, but of absolute necessity, the right honourable gentleman has left us entirely in the dark; and he appears so little impressed with the urgency of them, that he has not even hinted at them in the whole course of his speech.

Having, Sir, noticed the first point to which the honourable gentleman has called the attention of the house, I now come to the other parts on which his observations have been made, relative to the divided state and jarring interests of Ireland. He has first dwelt on the discontents of the Roman catholics; and in the next place he has described at some length the grievances of the protestants of the northern parts. He has, in the redress which he proposes to make to both sides, admitted, that concessions ought to be made to both parties; and from the statements of the right honourable gentleman, who thus wishes to reconcile opposite claims, I am confirmed in my opinion that he only desires, and is eager to effect an alteration in the frame of the parliament of Ireland, as far as it may arise out of the pretensions of the catholics, and out of the demands of the inhabitants of the north. And here, Sir, I feel myself called on to

notice the declaration made by the right honourable gentleman, that he would not enter into the particulars of the respective discontents of both parties, and yet he immediately after, notwithstanding that declaration, laid before the house a minute detail of circumstances on which I will not now dwell, thinking as I do, that a discussion of that nature is more calculated to inflame the minds of many than to prove of any essential service. When he came to mention the subject of religion, which has, according to his statements, produced many of the present discontents, he certainly did not seem very solicitous to preserve the church establishment, and though he does not wish to address the throne for the adoption of any particular line of conduct, it is something singular that he should recommend a measure that must affect a great mass of private property and even injure the church itself.

Not deeming it necessary to trouble the house any longer on these particulars, and convinced, as I am, that neither we nor the crown can interfere to effect that which exclusively belongs to the parliament of Ireland, I shall make a few observations on what has fallen from the right honourable gentleman with respect to the rights of which the Roman catholics are possessed, and also on the subject of those additional rights which it is his desire they should yet obtain. He observes that the catholics ought to have the general right of voting, of sitting in the legislative assembly, and of filling the public offices. To this, Sir, I answer, that they are in the actual possession of every other right, but that they certainly do not possess the right of voting for members of parliament, unless according to qualifications prescribed by law. This I conceive to be the mere state in which the catholics are placed. But, says the right honourable gentleman, enough has not been done to extend to them civil and religious liberties. Have not concessions of the most liberal kind been made to them since the revolution; and, during the present reign, has not every possible pledge been given to them of real affection and sincere zeal for their best interests on the part of the crown? But, Sir, it is curious to remark the detail which

the right honourable gentleman proposes, even admitting that the present subject is a proper one for us to recommend to the adoption of the executive government. In this detail there unquestionably arises an inconsistency, which he will find it no easy matter to do away. He first declares that he means to satisfy the catholics, by conferring on them the power of voting generally. But he immediately adds, that, by pursuing that measure, we shall not be able to give them any weight in point of political liberty; for, as he maintains that the elective franchise is so managed in Ireland, that it is entirely in the power of corporations to bestow or to withhold it, it would consequently be impossible for them to gain any material benefit, or to obtain any political influence, even if the law, which he himself wishes to be passed in their favour, were to take place. It therefore appears evident, that the remedy proposed by the right honourable gentleman himself, must be inadequate to meet the evil which he so seriously laments. And it naturally follows, as I have before had occasion to observe, that the great end of his plan is to alter essentially the whole frame of the constitution of the legislature of Ireland. In other words, Sir, the right honourable gentleman proposes an investigation and a scrutiny into the pretensions of the catholics of the south, and of the protestants of the north, for the express purpose of laying down what he considers to be just principles; and then the parliament of Ireland must be new modelled and revised, in consequence of his previous inquiry. But is it reasonable to call on the parliament of England to do that very thing which must not only be condemned by the parliament of Ireland, but is not entertained in the opinion of even a considerable number of persons? Yet, Sir, this question, which calls into doubt the existence of the whole constitution of Ireland, is to be brought forward on mere surmise, and without the shadow of authority. I say, it does not come within the constitutional right which we may possess, of controlling the executive government. It certainly does not come within the possibility of any right, which we can possess, of interfering in considerations which exclusively belong to a legislature totally separate from, and independent of us.

The other points which the right honourable gentleman has referred to, are lost, if possible, in more obscurity than that which I have just noticed. The various and clashing pretensions of the different parties are so extremely opposite, that it would be an arduous task to reconcile them. And if, in commending certain political principles which are acknowledged by the northerns, he has in his mind principles founded on the French doctrine of the sovereignty of the people, and intimately connected with those revolutionary tenets which have produced such vast mischiefs throughout Europe, I maintain, Sir, that it would be contrary to the duty of the parliament of Great Britain to entertain the motion of the right honourable gentleman, supported as it is by the speech which he has this night delivered. There are, Sir, none of his considerations on which we can prudently or safely pronounce; for there are none of them which may not excite such a flame as we shall never have it in our power to extinguish. They involve objects most delicate in their nature, and dangerous in their consequences. They embrace difficulties of a prodigious extent; and on which I shall not dwell, as they have been sufficiently described in the speech of the right honourable gentleman, so as to make us shudder with a just apprehension of the fatal and dreadful effects that must result from them. I must, therefore, Sir, consider the address proposed as a blind injunction, without any specific extent or means of execution. On this short ground I oppose the motion; and, with the conviction of the dangers that must arise from the adoption of it, with the solemn recognition of the independence of the parliament of Ireland, with a just sense of our duty that others may not in their turn be wanting to us, I cannot entertain a doubt but that the motion will be rejected by a considerable majority of the house.

The motion was rejected;

Ayes..... 84
Noes.....220

April 4, 1797.

Mr. SHERIDAN, conformably to the notice he had given on a former day, called the attention of the House to the subject of making further advances to the Emperor of Germany; concluding his observations with moving the following resolution: "That the House will resolve itself into a Committee of the whole House, to inquire whether it is consistent with a due regard to the essential interests of this country, that, under the present circumstances, any further loans or advances should be made to his Imperial Majesty."

Mr. PITT rose, as soon as the motion was read:

The speech of the honourable gentleman, who has just sat down, varied so much from his motion, and there was so little resemblance with the opinions he advanced, and the proposition with which he concluded, that I find it extremely difficult to adopt a train of argument which will bear upon both at one time. The argument of the honourable gentleman, which he pretended to found upon a long detail of circumstances, in his opinion undeniable in point of fact, and certainly, if they are true, very serious in their nature, pointed to a conclusion, in which, he premised that the house would betray their trust to their constituents, if they did not join, and from which, if they ventured to dissent, he apprehended the most fatal consequences would ensue to the country. He stated the subject now under discussion, as one not to be hung up or suspended, not as one upon which information ought to be collected, and mature deliberation exercised before a decision was passed; but he described it with all that richness of imagery and aptness of allusion of which he is so much master; with even multiplied illustrations, as one on which a moment's delay ought not to be permitted, and on which to hesitate was to sacrifice the best interests of the nation. It was a case, according to him, in which patience led to death. I must observe, in setting out, however, that his analogies, however various and beautiful, were not very appropriate. He represented the absurdity of inquiring into the nature of the instrument by which a wound was inflicted, before bandages and styp-

ties were applied, and the insanity of waiting for the coroner's inquest upon a person drowned, before the means recommended by the Humane Society were used for his recovery. He forgot, however, that his motion, as calculated to operate upon the political malady of the state, did not correspond with the steps which ought to be taken in the first instance with a person wounded or drowned. In order to make the allusion accurate, his argument should have stated, that the continuance of remittances to the emperor would produce an inability in the bank to make good their money payments; or, supposing that inability to have just arisen, he should have shewn, that the measure recommended in his motion was the best which could be adopted to remove that inability. It so happens, however, unfortunately for the accuracy of his allusion, that money payments have been suspended at the bank for a considerable time; that an order of council was issued as the best remedy at the moment for the difficulties of the bank; that this suspension has been recognized by the house of commons; and that the legislature, anxious to devise the best mode of restoring the credit of that corporation by reinstating it in its former situation of solvency, has thought proper, as a fit preliminary to that deliberation, to appoint a secret committee to inquire into the causes of its embarrassments. This is the true state of the question.

The honourable gentleman, in his argument, represented his motion as essential to the very being of the bank, and of the country, and as one from which the house cannot withhold its assent without sealing their own reproach and infamy, by sacrificing every trust which has been delegated to them by the nation; and when the motion was read, it turned out to be nothing more than an ambiguous attempt to make them pronounce indirectly an opinion upon a subject, upon which they were not yet in possession of information sufficient to enable them to pass a fair and just decision. For though the case was of such a nature, as represented in his speech, that it could admit of neither doubt nor delay, his motion went to nothing more than the appointment of a committee to inquire into the circumstances connected

with it. Does the honourable gentleman mean that the house should now resolve itself into that committee, and report to-night? If this is his intention, where would be the candour of the proceeding in respect of those who wish for further information, and who are unwilling to deliver an opinion till that information is collected? If he does not mean that the house should now resolve itself into this committee, then I object to the motion as ambiguous, disingenuous, and uncandid, as capable from its nature of being understood two ways, and as tending to mislead the house upon the subject on which they are called upon to decide. The honourable gentleman knows, and the house must be aware, that every question which respects the disposal of the public money must be agitated in a committee of the whole house, so that whether the house may think it proper to give their sanction to the honourable gentleman's argument or not, it must be in a committee of that description which the subject will eventually come before, and in which their decision will be finally given. There is this difference, however, that at present they are not in possession of that degree of information which is necessary for them to decide upon a question of so much importance; whereas they will then have the materials before them, from which such information is to be collected. If the honourable gentleman contends that the information of which they are at present in possession, is sufficient to enable them to form a correct judgment of what ought, or of what ought not to be done, why does he not move them to come to an immediate decision without going into a committee at all? In short, it was as superfluous in one view, as it is inconsistent and contradictory in another. I should not think that the house will consider it to be their duty to sanction the opinions of the honourable gentleman, upon a view of their general policy and expediency, far less that they will decide upon a subject of so much importance, with the scanty means of information now in their power; but if they mean to comply with the real object of the motion and the true wishes of the mover, let them do it in a fair and manly way, and not by assenting to a motion as ambiguous in its nature as

perfidious in its designs. This much I thought it right to say upon the narrow shape of the motion; and having said so much upon the question immediately before the house, it is the less necessary for me to dwell long upon the train of argument which prefaced the proposition on which it turns.

Though I differ very considerably from the honourable gentleman on many of the topics on which he touched, I entirely agree with him on the general importance of the subject. I agree with him in thinking that it is connected not only with the fate of a great and powerful empire, but with the general fate and destiny of the world; but in proportion to its magnitude, ought to be the caution of this house in deciding upon it on narrow and confined principles. That these are domestic considerations which are highly momentous, I readily admit, but I would remind the house that there may be a narrow mode of looking at them. Without attending to the circumstance of our having a great and powerful enemy to contend with, flushed with success, and ambitious of conquest, with means of bringing into the field more numerous armies than perhaps ever were known, and without attending to the circumstance of our insular situation, which in time of war renders a continental diversion of great consequence to our external security; but considering it merely as a question to be decided upon the principles of economy, and calculating the effect, which granting pecuniary remittances to his imperial majesty at the present moment, has a tendency to produce upon public credit, upon the success of the war, and in accelerating the period and improving the terms of peace, I have no hesitation in pronouncing an opinion, that the result of this calculation will be, that this country, by sending pecuniary assistance to her magnanimous and faithful ally, will adopt the best mode of consulting real economy, of restoring public credit, of prosecuting the war, while war is necessary, with advantage, and of securing a speedy and honourable issue to the contest. Were the house therefore to be driven to a decision upon the subject, I should state this as my clear opinion; but by deferring that decision till they have the means of information more fully

before them, the influence of my opinion, I firmly believe, will be superseded by their own conviction, and on that account I am happy that the honourable gentleman does not mean to press it to an ultimate decision to-night. The more the subject is discussed, the fewer doubts will be left upon the minds of gentlemen of the propriety of the measure, and the more the circumstances of the case are investigated and analyzed, the more will the opinion of its policy and utility be confirmed. As an opportunity for this discussion will hereafter occur, I do not think it necessary now to enter much at length upon the different topics connected with it. I shall, therefore, only say a few words on each of them.

In the first place let us try its merits as a measure of economy. And here I must remind the house that the honourable gentleman, by his own confession, does not bring forward the proposition as an indirect mode of forcing government to conclude a peace by disarming the country. The question therefore is, whether, as a mode of carrying on the war, the advantage which is likely to arise to this country from the co-operation of the emperor, secured by her pecuniary aid, is an equivalent for the temporary inconvenience which the public may sustain in consequence of sending these remittances? To estimate the advantages with the inconveniences is very difficult. But, in the outset, I must set right an assumption of the honourable gentleman respecting the difference of this country granting or withholding pecuniary assistance from her ally. The difference (which of itself is no small one) is not merely whether we are to carry on an offensive or defensive war: this is one consideration, but it is not the only one. The honourable gentleman may talk in as high terms as he will of French enthusiasm and French gallantry, but he cannot deny, at least he cannot in justice deny, an equal tribute of applause to Austrian valour and Austrian heroism. If we review the campaigns of the war, it is impossible to find in history instances of greater prowess in the soldier, of more accomplished talents in the general, or of more true magnanimity in the sovereign, than what they have exhibited. But the re-

sources of his imperial majesty are in such a situation, that, with all his zeal to persevere in the contest, and all his honour in keeping his engagements with his allies, he cannot put the full force of his dominions in action without pecuniary assistance. Will any man then tell me that, if we cut off all hope of this assistance, he may not be able to persevere in his exertions? Will any man tell me that, if there were no military diversions created upon the Rhine or in the Tyrol, on the north or on the south of France, her numerous armies would not be employed in menacing our territory, and perhaps in invading our coasts? Or will any man tell me that if we withhold pecuniary assistance from the emperor, that refusal may not lead to a separate peace between Germany and France? The difference, then, is not carrying on a defensive instead of an offensive war, but it is carrying on a war solely on your part, without any assistance to aid your efforts, or any diversion to divide the force of the enemy, instead of carrying on the war as at present, in conjunction with an ally whose exertions are able to resist the whole military power of France, while your fleets are occupied in protecting your trade and extending your foreign dominions. And do not the advantages which we enjoy, as they may be estimated from this short and simple statement, infinitely more than counterbalance any temporary inconvenience that we may sustain from the mode in which they are procured? The honourable gentleman took occasion to introduce the subject of a report from a secret committee of which he is a member, but which is not yet before the house. I should wish, therefore, that the house will wait till the report is produced, and not repose implicit confidence in any of the statements made by the honourable gentleman. I do not know whether the peace establishment came under the inquiry or calculation of that committee. I rather think that it could not immediately come under their investigation. But whether it did or not, I am happy to assure the house that no such result, nor any thing approaching to it, will be found to arise out of a fair examination of the circumstances of the country.

But I find I am discussing the question on grounds, on which I ought not to object to it. Upon the train of argument which I was before pursuing, it is easy to shew that, if we do not intend to lay down our arms, if we mean to continue any method of exertion, if it be our wish to be in a situation to persevere in hostilities, if hostilities are necessary from the overbearing pride and unjust pretensions of the enemy, it cannot be a measure of economy to abandon the plan of availing ourselves of the co-operation of his imperial majesty by contributing money to his assistance. When we consider the amount of the expense, and the magnitude of the service, there is no ground of comparison between them! Upon what data does the honourable gentleman assume that the measure will lead to any difference of expense at all? He may consider the war as unjust as it was unnecessary, and as ill conducted in its process as it was groundlessly undertaken: he may, if he pleases, think that the French were right in every thing in which this country thought them wrong, but he does not contend that we should this day throw down our arms and make unconditional submission to the enemy. Overlooking, then, the consideration of additional security arising from the co-operation of the emperor, and the effects of that co-operation acting upon the spirit, the trade, the manufactures, and the population of the country; overlooking, I say, these considerations (and surely when I put them aside none will suppose that I view them as trifling or unimportant) let him calculate the additional direct expense which it requires to protect our coasts from a vigilant and enterprizing foe, who would have nothing to do but to molest his only remaining enemy. Reduce the public expenses as much as you can, and let the inevitable burthens of the war be alleviated as much as possible by well judged economy in the different branches of the public service; but be not so weak or so treacherous to yourselves as to blot out one part of an estimate under pretence of economy, while you create another service which must be provided for at a much larger expense, and which would tend to aggravate the evil which it is your intention to cure.

The honourable gentleman does not recommend his motion, or rather he does not ground his opposition to the measure hereafter to be proposed upon the tendency of this opposition, to accelerate the restoration of peace. This, however, is an object which on no political question ought to be set out of view, and therefore I shall say a few words upon the subject in this point of light. Of those who wish for peace, there are two classes. There are some, and of these a very numerous body, who are desirous for peace, as soon as peace can be obtained on safe and honourable terms. To such it must be clear that the object of their wishes cannot be secured by laying aside the means of action. But there are others, and the honourable gentleman may be one, who are of opinion that, for the attainment of peace, there are no terms which we ought not to accept, no law to which we ought not to submit. Even those who entertain these humiliating ideas, would be guilty of insanity, were they to add to the degradation by laying aside one of the weapons to which they have to trust for the acquisition of their darling object. Such conduct would betray a desire not only to take any terms which the enemy might be pleased to dictate, but to take every means to render these terms as bad as possible. It is evident, then, that the measure in agitation affects the question of peace, both as it depends upon the period of its restoration, and the terms on which it may be concluded. Did the reasonings upon the subject leave any doubt as to the fact, the conduct of the enemy through the whole course of the war would put the matter beyond all question.

Having said so much upon the topics of economy and the return of peace, I proceed to advert to it as a means of restoring public credit. Now, what does the honourable gentleman here assume? He assumes, that the great operating cause of the present embarrassments has been foreign remittances; and upon this assumption, he objects to any further advances being made to the emperor. In this view of the subject, I shall beg leave to throw out a few suggestions, which will lead not only to a conclusion different from his, but to a conclusion directly opposite.

The honourable gentleman has had the goodness to give me

intimation, that he has some serious charges to prefer against me. Of course, I shall probably have opportunities enough in future of explaining my own conduct; and with the decision of the house I shall most willingly abide, whatever that decision may be. As this is not the subject of discussion on this night, perhaps it is improper in me to say any thing upon it. I would only beg leave to observe, that the printed papers, upon which the honourable gentleman commented, contain the written representations of the bank, and, it is added, my answers. These answers, however, were not given in writing, and what is there printed under this title, is merely minutes of what passed between me and the governor and deputy-governor of the bank, reported for the perusal of the bank-directors, without having been previously submitted to my examination; nor did I so much as see them till just before they were printed. The honourable gentleman argues, that advances to the emperor were calculated to produce ruinous consequences, that ruinous consequences did ensue, therefore, that the advances made to the emperor were productive of ruinous consequences. This is very short logic: but if he will not believe it to be false upon my authority, if it is not too much to ask, let him compare it with information. In order to make his conclusion good, he must shew that the remittances made to the emperor actually did diminish the cash in the bank, and that the issue of the order in council was occasioned by the diminution produced by these remittances. If it should appear that these advances did not occasion any diminution of cash at the time that they were made; on the contrary, that the balance of cash rather increased, and that the mischief so much and so justly lamented arose from the operation of causes widely different, then, in justice as well as prudence, the house ought not to ascribe an evil to a cause different from that in which it originated.

The honourable gentleman preferred another charge against me, which I heard without much dismay—that I had persisted in sending money to the emperor when I was aware that the bank, from the line of conduct I was pursuing, was approach

ing to a state of insolvency. This, again, he takes for granted without any information upon the subject. If it should turn out that, during the whole period that these remittances were made, so far was I from being aware of the approaching difficulties of the bank, that by the successful operation of commerce, the balance of exchange for all that time was in favour of this country, insomuch that, if these circumstances had continued, the state of the bank would at this day have been growing better, the honourable gentleman will surely not persist in the accusation, when he finds that the ground on which it was preferred is wholly and completely fallacious. The premises the honourable gentleman may wish to be taken on trust; but to this I object, not wishing to supersede his position by any assertion of my own, but merely because the house are not in possession of materials from which they can infer whether it be true or false. When these materials are before them, perhaps it may be found that the mischief arose from remittances of cash, which were sent to Ireland to a greater extent than usual, and to local alarms in this country, which caused a great run upon the bank for some time before the order in council was issued. This is all the answer which I think I need give to the honourable gentleman's charge of misrepresentation.

I have only a word more to say respecting an expression in the speech from the throne at the opening of the present session. In that speech his Majesty was advised to state, that the resources of the country were equal to every exertion—an expression founded certainly not upon a knowledge of the balance of cash or bullion at that time in the bank, but upon the survey of the general state of trade and manufactures of the kingdom. Our trade and manufactures certainly depend in a considerable degree upon the stability of public credit, which is interwoven with the independence of the country. To preserve that independence, then, is necessary above all things to the restoration of public credit; and, next to the preservation of this independence, is the prevention of the danger of a future run upon the bank. And here we may look at the question in two points of

view. Let us first look at the best way to procure the greatest quantity of cash; and, if the subject is fairly viewed, I do not despair of convincing the house that the remittance of a sum to the emperor, instead of obstructing and impeding the influx of cash into the kingdom, will accelerate and increase it. I will grant that, if collateral circumstances did not vary, the balance in our favour would be diminished precisely in proportion to the sum sent abroad. But will it be contended, that abandoning an ally would have no effect upon the markets of Europe, and that such a step, were it taken by this country, would not influence any of the avenues of her commerce? Such a position is so absurd and untenable, that it would be an insult on the good sense of the house to spend their time in combating it. But a profitable trade depends not only on the state of the purchaser to receive, but of the seller to send. And need I ask what effect it would have upon the zeal, the spirit, the industry, and, consequently, the trade and manufactures of the country, were our coasts to be incessantly threatened by the whole concentred force of France, which would be the case were the emperor obliged, in consequence of our refusing to aid him with money, to conclude a separate peace with our common enemy? When the subject, therefore, is viewed in this light, who is so short sighted as not to see, that the inconvenience which may arise from present exertion would be much more than counterbalanced by the pressure of subsequent events? If the argument be admitted in one case, there is no possible case to which it may not be applied. In short, it may be argued upon the same grounds, that, as soon as you experience the difficulties arising from a drain of cash, you must give up all your foreign connexions, and, upon this principle, you ought to withdraw your protection from all your possessions in the East and West Indies. Of these possessions, for instance, it might be said, "True, they have been accounted extremely valuable, they have yielded great profits, the produce of them has formed a great article of commerce, and been the cause of a vast influx of wealth into the country, but in time of war they put us to an expense; we will save

therefore in future the expense of protection." But how? By sacrificing all the present and future advantages which might flow from the possession of them. Precisely the same argument will apply to an ally.

But if the reasoning is just in the view of procuring an influx of cash from abroad, how much stronger is it in the view of promoting circulation at home, which is fully as necessary for the restoration of the credit of the bank as the other! If our foreign commerce would be affected by the abandonment of an ally, how much more would our internal situation be affected by the pressure which would naturally result from an enemy increasing in strength in a direct ratio to our inability to resist his efforts! Would not the natural consequence be a new alarm, accompanied with a disposition to hoard? And thus the immediate cause of the mischief would be renewed. I trust that, though there might be some cause for the late alarm, it is now almost gone by; and I am convinced, that the more the state of the country is inquired into, the less ground there is for despondency, or the apprehension of any danger which Englishmen may not boldly meet with the fortitude which belongs to the national character. While our object is however to remove alarm, and to restore the public credit, is it wise or prudent to court a greater alarm? Can it be expected that the effects of the greater would be less serious than of the slighter alarm, or that even the same effects would not do much more harm? Those, then, who look to the restoration of public credit in the bank of England as their favourite object, should be the last persons to counteract a measure which has an obvious tendency to produce that event to which their wishes and their endeavours tend: and how the honourable gentleman can claim the benefit of the argument drawn from his subject, I have yet to learn, nor can I even guess.

There is still another topic left, upon which I feel myself impelled to say a few words, namely, the additional security that would be given to credit by the restoration of peace. Whether the best mode of obtaining peace is to run the risk of losing the

aid of the emperor, is a question upon which there exists but little doubt. We have seen long ago that the uniform object of the enemy's policy has been to disunite us from our ally. This design has manifested itself in the course of several negociations and discussions, and we have seen a similar policy too successfully practised with other powers who were formerly leagued with us against France, and who have been seduced, some into a neutrality, others into open hostility against us. She has publicly and repeatedly declared her wish to make a separate peace with Austria, that she might be enabled to dictate terms to us, or to carry on the war against this country with greater effect. It is but very lately that we have heard that France has, a short time ago, made distinct overtures of peace to the emperor to the exclusion of this country, and that he, with his accustomed honour and good faith, instead of accepting of them, communicated them to the court of St. James's, and renewed his declaration to the enemy, that he would not conclude a peace except in conjunction with Great Britain, justly persuaded that no peace can be concluded on a permanent foundation, but one founded upon a due regard to the individual claims, and the common interests of the different powers of Europe.

Putting apart, therefore, the obligations of gratitude and honour, it must be obvious to every one whose views are not confined within the narrowest and most contracted limits, that the best mode of attaining the desirable object of peace is, to persevere in making a common cause with the emperor, and aiding him with those means which his own dominions do not furnish, but with which the resources of this country enable us to supply him. It is for this house to determine whether they will give success to the intrigues of the enemy, which have hitherto been frustrated by the fidelity and magnanimity of our ally, or whether they will persevere in those measures, which are most likely to bring the contest to a safe and honourable issue. To their judgment and their spirit I leave the decision, convinced that they will act in a manner becoming the representatives of a great and powerful nation. On these grounds I think there is no use in

countenancing the present measure, and as it does not commit the house to give any opinion upon the subject, I shall give it my negative.

The resolution was negatived,

Ayes 87
Noes 266

May 26, 1797.

Mr. GREY, in pursuance of the notice he had previously given, this day brought forward his proposition for a Reform in Parliament, concluding his speech with moving, for leave to bring in a bill to amend the representation of the people in the House of Commons.

After the motion had been seconded by Mr. Erskine, Mr. PITT rose:

Feeling, Sir, as I do, the danger with which the present proposition is attended, upon the grounds upon which it has been supported, and in the circumstances in which it has been brought forward, I am very desirous, as early as possible in the debate, to state the reasons by which I am determined to give it my most decided opposition. The honourable gentleman who introduced the motion, began with disclaiming very distinctly, and, as far as he went, very satisfactorily, all those abstract principles of imprescriptible right, all those doctrines of the rights of man, on which those without doors, who are most eager in their professions of attachment to the cause which he now supports, rest the propriety of their demand, and upon which alone they would be contented with any species of parliamentary reform. The honourable gentleman denies the truth of that principle which prescribes any particular form of government, as that which is essential to freedom; or that universal suffrage is necessary to civil liberty; or that it even must depend upon that light which the revolution of France has let in upon the world, but from which however, he derives hopes of so much advantage to the general

happiness of mankind. But, in disclaiming these views of the question, and in placing it upon the footing of the practical benefit it was calculated to produce, the honourable gentleman did not state all the considerations by which the conduct of a wise statesman was to be regulated, and the judgment of an upright senator to be guided. The question is not merely, whether some alteration might or might not be attended with advantage; but it is the degree of advantage which that alteration is likely to effect in the shape in which it is introduced; the mischief which may be occasioned from not adopting the measure, and the chance, on the other hand, of producing by the alteration an effect upon those to whom you give way, very different from that which had induced you to hazard the experiment. These are the considerations which the subject ought to embrace, and the views upon which impartial men must decide.

Before we adopt the conclusions of the right honourable gentleman, we have a right, it is even imposed upon us as a duty, to take into our view as a leading object, what probability there is by encouraging the particular mode of attaining that union, or of effecting that separation of the friends of moderate reform, and the determined enemies to the constitution, which they conceive it calculated to produce; we must consider the danger of introducing an evil of a much greater magnitude than that we are now desirous to repair; and how far it is prudent to give an opening for those principles which aim at nothing less than the total annihilation of the constitution. The learned gentleman who seconded the motion said, that those who formerly supported parliamentary reform had sown the seeds of that eagerness for parliamentary reform, which was now displayed, and of the principles on which it was now pressed; he thinks that those, who have ever supported the cause of parliamentary reform upon grounds of practical advantage, must not oppose those who have nothing in common with them, but the name of reform, making that the cover for objects widely different, in order to support that pretence which they assume upon principles diametrically opposite to those upon which the true friends to the

cause of reform ever proceeded. Will the honourable gentleman who made, or the learned gentleman who seconded the motion, say, that those men who contend, as an indispensable point, for universal suffrage;—that those who hold doctrines which go to the extinction of every branch of the constitution, because they think it convenient to avail themselves of the pretence of parliamentary reform, as the first step towards the attainment of their own views, and as facilitating their progress;—that those who, though they condescended to take advantage of the co-operation of those who support the cause of reform in this house, yet have never applied to parliament, and who would not even receive as a boon, what they contend for as a right;—can it seriously be said, that such men as these have embarked in the cause, or have proceeded on the principles of those, who upon far different grounds, and for far different objects, have moved this important question? Will they say, that those men have adopted the principles, or followed the course, of those who formerly have agitated the cause of reform, who have avowedly borrowed their political creed from the doctrines of the Rights of Man, from the writings of Thomas Paine, from the monstrous and detestable system of the French jacobins and and affiliated societies, from that proud, shallow, and presumptuous philosophy, which, pretending to communicate new lights to mankind, has carried theoretical absurdity higher than the wild imaginations of the most extravagant visionaries ever conceived, and carried practical evil to an extent which no age or history has equalled? Will it be said that those men pursued only that practical advantage, which a reform upon principles consonant to the British constitution was calculated to afford, who saw without emotion the detestable theories of the jacobins developed in the destructive ravage which marked their progress, and their practical effects in the bloody tragedies which were acted on the theatre of France, and who still adhered to their system of indefeasible right, when they saw such overwhelming proofs of its theoretical falsehood, and of its baleful tendency? Will it be believed that those men are actuated by principles con-

sonant to the spirit of the British constitution, who, with the exception of the pretence of parliamentary reform, adopted all the forms of French political systems, who followed them through all their consequences, who looked upon the ravage which they spread through all laws, religion, and property, without shrinking from their practical effect, and who deemed the horrors with which it was attended, as the triumphs of their system? Can we believe, that men who remained unmoved by the dismal example which their principles had produced, whose pretensions rose and fell with the success or the decline of jacobinism in every part of the world, were ever actuated by a similarity of motives and of objects, with those who prosecuted the cause of reform as a practical advantage, and maintained it upon constitutional views? The utmost point of difference, indeed, that ever subsisted between those who supported, and those who opposed the question of reform, previous to the French revolution, which forms a new era in politics, and in the history of the world, was union and concert in comparison with the views of those who maintained that question upon grounds of expediency, and those who assert it as a matter of right.

The question then was, with those who contended for reform on grounds of expediency, whether the means proposed were calculated to infuse new vigour into the constitution? The object with those who affect a parliamentary reform upon French principles, is the shortest way to compass its utter destruction. From the period when the new and alarming era of the French revolution broke in upon the world, and the doctrines which it ushered into light laid hold of the minds of men, I found that the grounds upon which the question rested were essentially and fundamentally altered. Whatever may have been my former opinion, am I to be told that I am inconsistent, if I feel that it is expedient to forego the advantage which any alteration may be calculated to produce, rather than afford an inlet to principles with which no compromise can be made; rather than hazard the utter annihilation of a system under which this country has flourished in its prosperity, by which it has been supported in

its adversity, and by the energy and vigour of which it has been enabled to recover from the difficulties and distresses, with which it has had to contend? In the warmth of argument upon this subject, the honourable and learned gentleman has conceived himself at liberty to assume a proposition, which was not only unsupported by reasoning, but even contradicted by his own statements. The learned gentleman assumed that it was necessary to adopt the moderate reform proposed, in order to separate those whom such a plan would satisfy, from those who would be satisfied with none; but who, I contend, by means of this, would only labour to attain the complete object of their wishes in the annihilation of the constitution. Those men who treat parliament as an usurpation, and monarchy as an invasion of the rights of man, would not receive a reform which was not the recognition of their right, and which they would consider as vitiated if conveyed in any other shape. Though such men had availed themselves of the aid of those who supported parliamentary reform on other grounds, would they be contented with this species of reform as an ultimate object?

But does the honourable and learned gentleman mean to assume that those who are the friends of moderate reform, (and I know not how such a wish has been expressed at all) must remain confounded with those whom no reform will satisfy, unless some measure like the present is adopted? Where has such a wish for moderate reform been expressed? If those who are even thought to entertain sentiments favourable to that cause, have cherished them in silence, if they have abstained from pressing them at a moment when they would have served only to promote the views of those who wished to annihilate, not to r form, is it to be apprehended that any ill effects will ensue, unless you adopt some expedient to distinguish the moderate reformer from the desperate foe? Yet this is the main argument of the learned gentleman, which he has put into a thousand different shapes. I do not believe, however, that the temper of moderate reformers will lead them to make common cause with the irreconcileable enemies of the constitution. If there

are really many who may be ranked as moderate reformers, it is at least probable that they feel the force of the danger which I have stated; that they think it wiser to check their wishes than to risk the inlet of jacobin principles, and the imprudence of affording to the enemies of the constitution the means of accomplishing its destruction. Has there been, however, any decisive manifestation of their desires, or is there reason to believe, that, disappointed in their wishes, they will be immediately driven beyond the bounds of duty to the constitution? If there is no security that those, whose views have already pointed beyond reform, will be recalled to better sentiments, if there are even certain grounds to believe that they will merely employ any reform that may be introduced, as a step towards realizing their own system, upon what pretence can the present measure be held out as calculated to reconcile those men to the constitution? From the conduct of gentlemen on the other side, it is obvious that they do not conceive any decisive manifestation of the wishes of the people for a moderate reform being now introduced, to have taken place. My reason for such an opinion is this: we have seen that the gentlemen in opposition have not been deficient in their efforts to procure every expression of the public concurrence in the objects for which they have contended. From their own account these efforts have not been unsuccessful; but, supposing that no efforts of theirs had been employed, and that to the spontaneous impulse of the people themselves are to be ascribed the petitions which have been voted in different quarters, to a degree indeed, in their opinion, to decide the sense of the country to be in favour of an immediate peace, and the removal of ministers, it follows, that those who have presented such petitions have not felt, or the exertions of opposition have not been able to excite, any expression of that opinion they have so often urged, that no change of men, without a change of system, would lead to any permanent good.

It does not appear then, that there is any call upon the house to adopt a measure which, so far from being necessary to satisfy men friendly to a moderate reform, they have not, in any shape,

expressed a wish to obtain. Before the practical expediency of this measure, then, comes to be discussed, the practical necessity of such a measure must be established. In this proof, however, the honourable and learned gentlemen have failed; I need not, therefore, go into the state of the country to refute the statements of the honourable gentlemen. Indeed, I must observe that every thing urged upon this topic, was nothing more than assertion. The calamities and difficulties under which the country labours, the war with France, and inroads upon the constitution, the profusion of public expenditure, were the topics upon which they insisted, and which they said would have been avoided if parliamentary reform had formerly been adopted. I boldly contend, however, that in the origin of the war, in the efforts to an unparalleled extent which the novelty of the contest, and the nature of the enemy, forced us to exert; that in what they call inroads, and which we contend were necessary bulwarks for the defence of the constitution, the feelings of the people went uniformly along with the proceedings of parliament. I will venture to assert, without the fear of contradiction, that in no time when the tide of prosperity began to turn in favour of this country, when the nation began to recover from the struggles and from the burdens of the American war, when, year after year, the sources of public wealth and individual happiness were increasing and extending, had the functions of parliament been more congenial to the feelings of the people, than in the painful yet necessary struggles to which we were obliged to submit in the present contest. That the nation has suffered, during the progress of the war, many and serious calamities, I do not dispute; calamities, however, much less severe in their effects than those which have been undergone by countries acting upon a different system.

It has indeed been urged, and with no ordinary degree of perseverance, that the voice of the nation is against the proceedings of government: that, however, is more a matter of opinion than of fact; and every man will naturally judge of the credit that ought to attach to such an assertion, from the sentiments

which are expressed in the circle of his own acquaintance, and from his personal inquiries on the subject. But I will undertake to say, that at the present moment, amidst all the difficulties and embarrassments, unavoidably occasioned by the vigorous prosecution of hostilities, the system pursued by parliament in support of the measures of government, is the system of the people; and parliament at no period possessed in a more ample degree the confidence of the country than it does now. [Here Mr. Fox shewed some signs of dissent.] The honourable gentleman may be disposed to controvert this opinion, but I am sure he cannot maintain the contrary with more sincerity or with more perfect conviction than I advance what I now assert. The right honourable gentleman, the house will recollect, was accustomed to assert last session of parliament, with equal boldness and vehemence as now, that the sense of the country was against the system of ministers. Good God! Where can the honourable gentleman have lived? In what remote corner of the country can he have passed his time? What great public question can he state, upon which the public have not evinced a great degree of interest, as great as that shewn upon any former occasion? On the contrary, if ever there was a period which we should select, as the one in which the attention of the public was the most turned to public affairs, it was precisely that period in which the learned gentleman has described the public to have lost all interest in the deliberations of parliament.

I know it is maintained that parliament does not represent the great body of the nation, and that the result of general elections gives no striking character or impressive feature of the sentiments of the people: but I desire it may also be recollected, whether there are not many leading instances, and particular circumstances attendant on general elections, that go strongly to express the opinion entertained by the constituent body; and taking up the consideration in that point of view, I do insist, and am convinced the position cannot be objected to, that the approbation given by those who had been members of the last parliament, to the commencement and prosecution of the war,

were strong and powerful recommendations in their favour at the late general elections. I will for a moment, pursuing this argument, request the house to take the parliamentary representation as it has been stated and recommended by the honourable gentleman *. I will desire the honourable gentleman himself to look for an instant to his own statement of the proposed additional representation of the counties, and then candidly decide, whether he can argue that the sense of the people was not in a great degree to be collected at general elections? It is submitted in that statement, to extend the number of county members from ninety-two to one hundred and thirteen; the augmentation, therefore, did not consist of many: and does the honourable gentleman intend to except the ninety-two former members by a general proscription? or will he pretend to say, that the system of counties, as it stands at present in point of representation, goes for nothing? Certainly he cannot undertake to advance such an argument, and so evidently inconsistent with his own plan of reform. If, therefore, the one hundred and thirteen members proposed by the honourable gentleman to represent the counties, would express the true sense of the people, it cannot be denied on the same grounds, that the ninety-two who were elected by their constituents, were in a very considerable proportion the organs of the public opinion. The arguments therefore adduced by the honourable gentleman go against his own declaration, that the sense of the people was not the sense of parliament; and that sense had been fully manifested in favour of the war at the general elections. Since, therefore, I recollect the former declaration of the honourable gentleman at the end of the last session of parliament, that parliament did not possess the confidence of the people, am I to be discouraged now, after the general election, from saying that they actually did enjoy that confidence? But that is not the only statement which I can make in justification of this assertion. I will appeal to the proceedings in great and populous cities, as well as in the

* Mr. Grey.

city of London, in which the opinions of gentlemen on the other side of the house, with respect to parliament not possessing the confidence of the people, were as strongly refuted, on a fair poll, by a vast majority of the electors, as by the elections for the counties to which he has referred. It consequently appears that the honourable gentleman has not specific ground to proceed on; and that he has totally failed in the foundation of his assertion, that parliament does not enjoy the public confidence. The learned gentleman has in the fanciful flights of his eloquence, pushed his objects farther than his honourable friend; for he has not only said, that parliament has lost the confidence of the people, but that the proceedings of parliament have no effect whatever on the public mind.

The learned gentleman, however, wished to unite two classes of persons very opposite in their pursuits. He desires to reconcile those, who by the very nature of their principles are altogether irreconcileable; those whose political doctrines are known to be inimical to legal government, and those who are distinguished by the moderation of their tenets. With respect to the moderates, it could not be too minutely attended to by the house, that they propose no plan of reform whatever; that they prefer no complaints; that they set out with no petition on that subject; and is it proper or reasonable that the house should spontaneously give what had not been even demanded? With regard to the other persons alluded to by the learned gentleman, the house, by agreeing to what has been urged in their favour, would give them not merely what they claim, but what they demand as an absolute right, and what is in reality the first step to the accomplishment of their real views. That the present moment should be a time for the measure of reform appears rather inconsistent, when it is admitted by the learned gentleman himself that radical discontent is prevalent in the country, and when it is undeniable, that the men who talk of liberty aim merely at licentiousness, and set up the name of reform as a disguise to mask their revolutionary projects, and as the first step to their acknowledged system of innovation. Concessions to such men, at such a time,

would be impolitic, would be fatal, would be absurd. The house also, by agreeing to the arguments of the learned gentleman, would grant what could not be of any use to one set of men, and what would be productive of great mischief to the other description. Such concessions, I will maintain, are not warranted by the sound maxims of philosophy, nor to be measured by the numerous examples drawn from the history of the world.

The honourable gentleman * has talked highly of the blessings which are to result to mankind from the establishment of French liberty; and because new lights have appeared to set off the doctrine of freedom, this house is therefore to alter their principles of government, and to accommodate themselves to the new order of things. The system of French liberty is represented as a new light diffusing itself over all the world, and spreading in every region happiness and improvement. Good God! is the house to be told, after the benefits which have been derived from the revolution in this country, that other and more essential benefits are to be added by adopting the principles of the French revolution? From such lights, however, I hope we shall ever protect this constitution, as against principles inconsistent with any government. If we are to be relieved from any evils under which we may at present labour, by means of this new light, I for one beg leave to enter my solemn protest against the idea. The doctrines upon which it is founded, are, as I have already said, false, shallow, and presumptuous, more absurd than the most pestilent theories that were ever engendered by the disordered imagination of man; more hostile to the real interests of mankind, to national prosperity, to individual happiness, to intellectual and moral improvement, than any tyranny by which the human species was ever afflicted. And, for this new luminary, shall we abandon the polar star of the British constitution, by which we have been led to happiness and glory, by which the country has supported every danger, which it has been called upon to encounter,

* Mr. Grey.

and risen superior to every difficulty by which it has been assailed?

But, independent of these general grounds on which I have opposed this motion, I have no difficulty in stating that the particular measure appears liable to so many objections, that in no circumstances could I have given it my assent. Indeed I could as little concur in the plan of the honourable gentleman as in a proposal for universal suffrage: how near it approaches to that system I shall not now discuss. The honourable gentleman, on a former occasion, has said, that he would rather have universal suffrage than no reform. The learned gentleman, however, disclaims universal suffrage, when asserted as a matter of right. Certainly, indeed, some people have reason to complain of the learned gentleman who, in supporting a plan of reform on grounds of practical advantage, refuses that universal suffrage to which he has no objection on practical grounds, merely because it is asked as a matter of right. He will, however, find it difficult to reconcile that practical expedience with the new light of general freedom which has so unexpectedly broken in upon the world. The proposition, however, is neither more nor less than, with the exception of one fifth, to abolish the whole system of the representation of this country, as it has been formed by charter or by parliamentary arrangement, as it has been moulded by time and experience, as it has been blended with our manners and customs, without regard to the rights or compensations, or to the general effect of modifications. All these are to be swept away and a numerical scale of representation to be substituted in its place; the country is to be divided into districts, and every householder, paying taxes, is to vote; thus a system would be introduced little short of universal suffrage. On what experience, on what practice is this gigantic scale of numerical representation to be introduced; In former plans the variety of the modes of representation was admitted to be proof, how much better time and circumstances may mould and regulate representation than any institutions founded on reasonings *a priori*, and how neces-

sary it was to give way to the effects of such experience. It is not the harsh uniformity of principles, each pushed to its extreme, but the general complexion arising out of the various shades, which forms the harmony of the representation, and the practical excellence of the constitution, capable of improving itself consistently with its fundamental principles. Who will say that this beautiful variety may not have contributed to the advantage of the whole? That system was practical, and experience has confirmed the excellence of it, but the present plan goes the whole length of destroying all the existing representation, with the exception only of the county members (why they alone are excepted I am at a loss to conceive), and bringing all to one system. Are the gentlemen who propose this system aware of the benefits resulting from a varied state of representation, and are they ready at once to resign them.

It never was contended that the inequality of the representation has been attended with any practical disadvantage, that the interest of Yorkshire was neglected because it sent only two members to parliament, or that Birmingham and Manchester experienced any ill consequences from having no representatives. How does it appear that universal suffrage is better than if the right to vote be founded on numerical, or even alphabetical arrangement? There is no practice, certainly no recognised practice, for its basis. The experiment proposed is new, extensive, overturning all the ancient system, and substituting something in its stead without any theoretical advantage, or any practical recommendation. In the mixed representation which now subsists, the scot and lot elections are those which have been chiefly objected to, and the honourable gentleman opposite to me formerly agreed with me in opinion, that burgage tenures and small corporations were even less exceptionable than open burghs with small qualifications. Yet this extension of small qualifications, from which it has been a general complaint that much confusion, debauchery, and abuse at elections arose, forms the principal feature in the honourable gentleman's plan.

Upon these grounds, therefore, looking seriously at the situa-

tion of the country, examining facts with attention, unless we would seal our own dishonour, unless we would belie the testimony of our constituents, we must dissent from the reasons on which the necessity of this proposition is founded. We ought to resist the specific plan which the honourable gentleman has offered, unless we would renounce the tried system of our representation, for a plan at once highly exceptionable in theory, and totally unsupported by experience.

The motion was negatived;

Ayes 91
Noes 256

June 2, 1797.

Mr. PITT moved the order of the day for taking into consideration his Majesty's message relative to the Mutiny in the Fleet—

"GEORGE R.

"It is with the deepest concern his Majesty acquaints the House of Commons, that the conduct of the crews of some of his ships now at the Nore, in persisting in the most violent and treasonable acts of mutiny and disobedience, notwithstanding the full extension to them of all the benefits which had been accepted with gratitude by the rest of his Majesty's fleet, and notwithstanding the repeated offers of his Majesty's gracious pardon, on their returning to their duty, have compelled his Majesty to call on all his faithful subjects to give their utmost assistance in repressing such dangerous and criminal proceedings. His Majesty has directed a copy of the proclamation which he has issued for this purpose, to be laid before the House; and he cannot doubt that his parliament will adopt, with readiness and decision, every measure which can tend, at this important conjuncture, to provide for the public security. And his Majesty particularly recommends it to the consideration of Parliament, to make more effectual provision for the prevention and punishment of all traiterous attempts to excite sedition and mutiny in his Majesty's naval service; or to withdraw any part of his Majesty's forces, by sea or land, from their duty and allegiance to him: and from that obedience and discipline which are so important to the prosperity and safety of the British empire.

G. R."

The Message being read, Mr. Pitt spoke to the following effect—

Important as the present occasion is, I feel that it will not be necessary for me to detain the house with a long detail upon the subject of the gracious communication from the throne, which has now been read to us. By that communication we learn that all the benefit of his Majesty's gracious favour, which restored satisfaction to part of his Majesty's forces, was attended with every mark of duty and gratitude by that part, and was extended to the whole of his Majesty's fleet; but that, nevertheless, there are now at the Nore deluded persons who have persisted in disobedience, and proceeded to open acts of mutiny and disorder, although all the same benefits have been allowed to them; the same liberal allowance which was agreed upon by parliament, and his Majesty's most gracious pardon, have been offered to them in the same generous manner as it was to those who have returned to their duty. We have the mortification now to learn that mutiny is carried on to the most dangerous and criminal excess, to such a length, that the persons concerned in it have gone into open and undisguised hostility against his Majesty's forces acting under orders and commands from regular authority. Much as we must deplore such events, much as we must feel them as an aggravation of the public difficulties with which we have to contend, yet we must all feel it to be the duty of the house of commons to shew to its constituents, and to the world at large, that there is no difficulty which they will not meet with firmness and resolute decision; that we will take measures to extricate the country from its difficulties in a manner that is worthy of the representatives of a great, a brave, a powerful, and a free people. I am persuaded that, under our present circumstances, we can have no hesitation in laying at the foot of the throne an address of assurance, that we will afford his Majesty every effectual support in our power; that we will counteract, as far as we can, so fatal an example as has, by the most consummate wickedness, been set to his Majesty's naval force; that we will shew that we feel a just indignation against a con-

duct so unworthy of, so inconsistent with, the manly and generous character of British seamen; that we feel resentment at so ungrateful a return to the generosity of a liberal parliament, and the mildness and benignity of an illustrious throne. I trust, that we shall recollect what our duty is in such a conjuncture. I trust too, that as these late proceedings are utterly repugnant to the real spirit of the British sailor, contrary to the conduct which has established the glory of the British navy, and the renown of the British nation, it will appear that it was not in the hearts of British seamen that such mutinous principles originated. I trust that we shall shew also, that if there are among us those who are enemies to the fundamental interests of this country, to its glory, to its safety, and to its existence as a nation, whose malignity is directed to the honour and even existence of our navy, who carry on their diabolical artifice by misrepresentation of facts, to pervert the dispositions and change the principles of the seamen, by instilling into their minds false alarms and apprehensions, and prevail upon them to do acts contrary to their instinct, and that too when they are called upon to contend with an enemy—I trust, I say, that if there be among us such foes, they may be detected and dealt with as they deserve. Our indignation should be more active against the seducers than the seduced and misguided.

Whether, according to the existing law against the open attempts that we have seen made upon another branch of his Majesty's service to shake its loyalty, but which, to the honour of that body, remains unmoved, and I trust is immoveable, we possess power enough to punish, as they deserve, such wicked offenders, may be a matter perhaps of doubt. I shall, however, instantly proceed to that part of the recommendation in his Majesty's message, and to state my ideas upon the law against persons who shall excite his Majesty's forces to mutiny or disobedience. It is not necessary for me to enter now into particulars upon that subject; but I feel it my duty to declare, that if the address which I shall propose shall meet, as I hope and confidently trust it will, the unanimous sense of the house, I shall

immediately move for leave to bring in a bill for the better prevention of the crime I have already stated. There is, I am persuaded, in this house, but one sense of the great guilt of this offence, of the notoriety of its practice, and of the danger of its consequences; in short, there exists every ground upon which penal law can be applied to any offence, viz. the mischief of the act itself, and the frequency of its commission. The remedy which I mean to propose for the consideration of parliament, will, I trust, be sufficiently efficacious to attain its object, without o'erstepping the moral guilt and real malignity of the crime. While, however, we all feel it to be our duty to enter on the consideration of such legislative provision, while parliament is not wanting in its duty at such a crisis of public affairs. I trust also that we shall not be disappointed in our expectation of the spirit of the public collectively or individually; that they will not be wanting in their exertions in such a crisis; that they will be animated, collectively and individually, with a spirit that will give energy and effect to their exertions; that every man who boasts, and is worthy of the name of an Englishman, will stand forth in the metropolis, and in every part of the kingdom, to maintain the authority of the laws, and enforce obedience to them, to oppose and counteract the machinations of the disaffected, and to preserve a due principle of submission to legal authority. I trust that all the inhabitants of the kingdom will unite in one common defence against internal enemies, to maintain the general security of the kingdom, by providing for the local security of each particular district; that we shall all remember, that by so doing we shall give the fullest scope to his Majesty's forces against foreign enemies, and also the fullest scope to the known valour and unshaken fidelity of the military force of the kingdom against those who shall endeavour to disturb its internal tranquillity. Such are the principles which I feel, and upon which I shall act for myself, and such are the principles, and will be the conduct, I hope, of every man in this house and out of it; such are the sentiments that are implanted in us all; such the feelings that are inherent in the

breast of every Englishman. I should insult the house by shewing that I distrusted its character, and the character of the country, if I said more, and I should have neglected my duty if I had said less. I now move, Sir.

"That an humble address be presented to his Majesty to return his Majesty the thanks of this house for his most gracious message:

"To express to his Majesty the concern and indignation which we must feel in common with his Majesty, at the heinous and criminal conduct of the crews of some of his Majesty's ships, notwithstanding the offer so repeatedly made to them of his Majesty's most gracious pardon, and the proofs of the paternal regard of his Majesty, and of the liberality of parliament, which they have received in common with the rest of his Majesty's fleet.

"To assure his Majesty, that we are ready and determined to afford to his Majesty our utmost assistance in repressing such dangerous and criminal proceedings, and to adopt every measure which can tend, at this conjuncture, to provide for the public security: with this view we shall proceed, without delay, in pursuance of the recommendation of his Majesty, to consider of such further provision as it may be necessary to make, for the more effectual prevention and punishment of all traiterous attempts to excite mutiny in any part of his Majesty's forces, or to withdraw them from their duty and allegiance, and from that obedience and discipline which are so important to the prosperity and the safety of the British empire:

"That we have the fullest reliance, that all his Majesty's faithful subjects, from sentiments of loyalty and attachment to his Majesty, and a just anxiety for their dearest interests, will be eager to manifest, at so important a crisis, a full determination to contribute, on every occasion, their utmost exertions for the support of legal authority, the maintenance of peace and order, and the general protection and defence of his Majesty's kingdoms."

The question on the address was put and agreed to *nemine contradicente*.

November 10, 1797.

The order of the day being read for the House to take into consideration the papers which had been laid before them by his Majesty's direction, relative to the late negociation at Lisle, and the address of the House of Lords being also read, Mr. Dundas moved "that the House do concur with their Lordships in that address."

After Sir John Sinclair and Lord Temple had spoken, the former of whom moved an amendment to the address,

Mr. Pitt rose, and delivered his sentiments as follows:

Sir—Having come to this house with the firm persuasion, that there never existed an occasion, when the unanimous concurrence of the house might be more justly expected than on a proposal, to agree in the sentiments contained in the address which has been read, I must confess myself considerably disappointed, in some degree, even by the speech of my noble relation, (much as I rejoice in the testimony which he has given of his talents and abilities,) and still more by the speech of the honourable baronet, and by the amendment which he has moved. I cannot agree with the noble lord in the extent to which he has stated his sentiments, that we ought to rejoice that peace was not made; much less, Sir, can I feel desirous to accept, on the part of myself or my colleagues, either from my noble kinsman, or any other person, the approbation which he was pleased to express, of the manner in which we have concluded the negociation. *We* have not concluded the negociation—the negociation has been concluded by others; we have not been suffered to continue it; our claim to merit, if we have any, our claim to the approbation of our country is, that we persisted in every attempt to conduct that negociation to a pacific termination, as long as our enemies left us, not the prospect, but the chance or possibility of doing so, consistent with our honour, our dignity, and our safety. We lament and deplore the disappointment of the sincere wishes which we felt, and of the earnest endeavours which we employed; yet we are far from suffering those sentiments to induce us to adopt the

unmanly line of conduct that has been recommended by the honourable baronet; this is not the moment to dwell only on our disappointment, to suppress our indignation, or to let our courage, our constancy, and our determination, be buried in the expressions of unmanly fear, or unavailing regret. Between these two extremes, it is, that I trust our conduct is directed; and in calling upon the house to join in sentiments between those extremes, I do trust, that if we cannot have the unanimous opinion, we shall have the general and ready concurrence both of the house and of the country.

Sir, before I trouble the house, which I am not desirous of doing at length, with a few points which I wish to recapitulate, let me first call to your minds the general nature of the amendment which the honourable baronet has, under these circumstances, thought fit to propose, and the general nature of the observations by which he introduced it. He began with deploring the calamities of war, on the general topic, that all war is calamitous. Do I object to this sentiment? No: but is it our business at a moment when we feel that the continuance of that war is owing to the animosity, the implacable animosity of our enemy, to the inveterate and insatiable ambition of the present frantic government of France, not of the people of France, as the honourable baronet unjustly stated it—is it our business at that moment to content ourselves with merely lamenting in common-place terms the calamities of war, and forgetting that it is part of the duty which, as representatives of the people, we owe to our government and our country, to state that the continuance of those evils upon ourselves, and upon France too, is the fruit only of the conduct of the enemy; that it is to be imputed to them, and not to us?

Sir, the papers which were ordered to be laid on the table have been in every gentleman's hand, and on the materials which they furnish we must be prepared to decide. Can there be a doubt, that all the evils of war, whatever may be their consequences, are to be imputed solely to his Majesty's enemies? Is there any man here prepared to deny, that the

delay in every stage of the negociation, and its final rupture, are proved to be owing to the evasive conduct, the unwarrantable pretensions, the inordinate ambition, and the implacable animosity of the enemy? I will shortly state what are the points, though it is hardly necessary that I should state them, for they speak loudly for themselves, on which I would rest that proposition; but if there is any man who doubts it, is it the honourable baronet? Is it he who makes this amendment, leaving out every thing that is honourable to the character of his own country, and seeming to court some new complaisance on the part of the French directory?—the honourable baronet, who, as soon as he has stated the nature of his amendment, makes the first part of his speech a charge against his Majesty's ministers, for even having commenced the negociation in the manner, and under the circumstances in which they did commence it—who makes his next charge, their having persevered in it, when violations of form and practice were insisted upon in the earliest stage of it? Does he discover that the French government, whom we have accused with insincerity, have been sincere from the beginning to the end of the negociation? Or, after having accused his Majesty's ministers for commencing and persevering in it, is the honourable baronet so afraid of being misconstrued into an idea of animosity against the people of France, that he must disguise the truth, must do injustice to the character and cause of his own country, and leave unexplained the cause of the continuance of this great contest? Let us be prepared to probe that question to the bottom, to form our opinion upon it, and to render our conduct conformable to that opinion. This, I conceive, to be a manly conduct, and, especially at such a moment, to be the indispensable duty of the house. But let not the honourable baronet imagine there is any ground for his apprehension, that by adopting the language of the address, which ascribes the continuance of the war to the ambition of the enemy, we shall declare a system of endless animosity between the nations of Great Britain and France. I say directly the contrary. He who scruples to declare, that in the present

moment the government of France are acting as much in contradiction to the known wishes of the French nation, as to the just pretensions and anxious wishes of the people of Great Britain—he who scruples to declare them the authors of this calamity, deprives us of the consolatory hope which we are inclined to cherish, of some future change of circumstances more favourable to our wishes.

It is a melancholy spectacle, indeed, to see in any country, and on the ruin of any pretence of liberty however nominal, shallow, or delusive, a system of tyranny erected, the most galling, the most horrible, the most undisguised in all its parts and attributes that has stained the page of history, or disgraced the annals of the world; but it would be much more unfortunate, if when we see that the same cause carries desolation through France, which extends disquiet and fermentation through Europe, it would be worse, indeed, if we attributed to the nation of France that, which is to be attributed only to the unwarranted and usurped authority which involves them in misery, and would, if unresisted, involve Europe with them in one common ruin and destruction. Do we state this to be animosity on the part of the people of France? Do we state this in order to raise up an implacable spirit of animosity against that country? Where is one word to that effect in the declaration to which the honourable gentleman has alluded? He complains much of this declaration, because it tends to perpetuate animosity between two nations which one day or other must be at peace—God grant that day may be soon! But what does that declaration express upon the subject? Does it express, that because the present existing government of France has acted as it has acted, we forego the wish or renounce the hope that some new situation may lead to happier consequences? On the contrary, his Majesty's language is distinctly this: "While this determination continues to prevail on the part of his enemies, his Majesty's earnest wishes and endeavours to restore peace to his subjects must be fruitless; but his sentiments remain unaltered; he looks with anxious expectation to the moment

when the government of France may shew a temper and spirit in any degree corresponding with his own." I wish to know whether words can be found in the English language which more expressly state the contrary sentiment to that which the honourable baronet imputes; they not only disclaim animosity against the people of France in consequence of the conduct of its rulers, but do not go the length of declaring, that after all this provocation, even with the present rulers, all treaty is impracticable. Whether it is probable, that acting on the principles upon which they have acquired their power, and while that power continues, they will listen to any system of moderation or justice at home or abroad, it is not now necessary to discuss; but for one, I desire to express my cordial concurrence in the sentiment, so pointedly expressed in that passage of the declaration, in which his Majesty, notwithstanding all the provocation he has received, and even after the recent successes, which, by the blessing of Providence, have attended his arms, declares his readiness to adhere to the same moderate terms and principles which he proposed at the time of our greatest difficulties, and to conclude peace on that ground, if it can now be obtained, even with this very government.

I am sensible, that while I am endeavouring to vindicate his Majesty's servants against the charges of the honourable baronet, which are sufficiently, however, refuted by the early part of his own speech, I am incurring, in some degree, the censure of the noble lord to whom I before alluded. According to his principles and opinions, and of some few others in this country it is matter of charge against us that we even harbour in our minds at this moment, a wish to conclude peace upon the terms which we think admissible with the present rulers of France. I am not one of those who can or will join in that sentiment. I have no difficulty in repeating what I stated before, that in their present spirit, after what they have said, and still more, after what they have done, I can entertain little hope of so desirable an event. I have no hesitation in avowing, for it would be idleness and hypocrisy to conceal it, that for the sake of

mankind in general, and to gratify those sentiments which can never be eradicated from the human heart, I should see with pleasure and satisfaction the termination of a government whose conduct, and whose origin is such as we have seen that of the government of France: but that is not the object—that ought not to be the principle of the war, whatever wish I may entertain in my own heart; and whatever opinion I may think it fair or manly to avow, I have no difficulty in stating, that violent and odious as is the character of that government, I verily believe, in the present state of Europe, that if we are not wanting to ourselves, if, by the blessing of Providence, our perseverance, and our resources, should enable us to make peace with France upon terms in which we taint not our character, in which we do not abandon the sources of our wealth, the means of our strength, the defence of what we already possess; if we maintain our equal pretensions, and assert that rank which we are entitled to hold among nations—the moment peace can be obtained on such terms, be the form of government in France what it may, peace is desirable, peace is then anxiously to be sought. But unless it is attained on such terms, there is no extremity of war, there is no extremity of honourable contest, that is not preferable to the name and pretence of peace, which must be in reality a disgraceful capitulation, a base, an abject surrender of every thing that constitutes the pride, the safety, and happiness of England.

These, Sir, are the sentiments of my mind on this leading point, and with these sentiments I shape my conduct between the contending opinions of the noble lord and of the honourable baronet. But there is one observation of the honourable baronet on which I must now more particularly remark. He has discovered that we state the Directory of France to have been all along insincere, and yet take merit for having commenced a negociation, which we ought never to have commenced without being persuaded of their sincerity. This supposed contradiction requires but a few words to explain it. I believe that those who constitute the *present* government of France never were sincere

for a moment in the negociation: from all the information I have obtained, and from every conjecture I could form, I, for one, never was so duped as to believe them sincere; but I did believe, and I thought I knew, that there was a general prevailing wish for peace, and a predominant sense of its necessity growing and confirming itself in France, and founded on the most obvious and most pressing motives. I did see a spirit of reviving moderation gradually gaining ground, and opening a way to the happiest alterations in the general system of that country: I did believe that the violence of that portion of the executive government, which, by the late strange revolution of France, unhappily for France itself and for the world, has gained the ascendancy, would have been restrained within some bounds; that ambition must give way to reason; that even phrensy itself must be controlled and governed by necessity. These were the hopes and expectations I entertained. I did, notwithstanding, feel, that even from the outset, and in every step of that negociation, those who happily had not yet the full power to cut it short in the beginning, who dared not trust the public eye with the whole of their designs, who could not avow all their principles, unfortunately, nevertheless, did retain from the beginning power enough to control those who had a better disposition; to mix in every part of the negociation, which they could not then abruptly break off, whatever could impede, embarrass, and perplex, in order to throw upon us, if possible, the odium of its failure.

Sir, the system of France is explained by the very objections that are made against our conduct. The violent party could not, as I have stated, at once break off the treaty on their part, but they wished to drive England to the rupture; they had not strength enough to reject all negociation, but they had strength enough to mix in every step those degradations and insults, those inconsistent and unwarranted pretensions in points even of subordinate importance, which reduced ministers to that opinion which I have described; but which they decided in a way that has exposed them to the censure of the honourable baronet.

They chose rather to incur the blame of sacrificing punctilios (at some times essential) rather than afford the enemy an opportunity of evading this plain question—Is there any ground, and, if any, what, upon which you are ready to conclude peace? To that point it was our duty to drive them; we have driven them to that point; they would tell us no terms, however exorbitant and unwarrantable, upon which they would be ready to make peace. What would have been the honourable baronet's expedient to avoid this embarrassment? It would have been, as he has this day informed us, an address which he had thought of moving in the last session, and which, indeed, I should have been less surprised had he moved, than if the house had concurred in it; he would have moved that no *projet* should be given in till the enemy were prepared to present a *contre projet*. If it was a great misfortune that that address was not moved, I am afraid some of the guilt belongs to me, because the honourable baronet did suggest such an idea, and I did with great sincerity and frankness tell him, that if he was really a friend to peace, there was no motion he could make so little calculated to promote that object; and I did prevail upon the honourable baronet to give up the intention. If I am right in the supposition I have stated; if I am right in thinking that our great object was to press France to this point, and to put the question —if you have any terms to offer, what are they?—was there any one way by which we could make it so difficult for them to retain any pretence of a desire for peace, as to speak out ourselves, and call upon them either for agreement, or for modification, or for some other plan in their turn? By not adopting the honourable baronet's plan, we have put the question beyond dispute, whether peace was attainable at last, and whether our advances would or would not be met on the part of France; and I shall, to the latest hour of my life, rejoice that we were fortunate enough to place this question in the light which defies the powers of misrepresentation, in which no man can attempt to perplex it, and in which it presents itself this day for the decision of the house and of the nation, and calls upon every individual

who has at stake the public happiness and his own, to determine for himself, whether this is or is not a crisis which requires his best exertions in the defence of his country.

To shew which, I shall now proceed, notwithstanding the reproach which has been thrown on our line of conduct, to shew the system even of obstinate forbearance, with which we endeavoured to overcome preliminary difficulties, the determined resolution on our part to overlook all minor obstacles and to come to the real essence of discussion upon the terms of peace. To shew this, it is not necessary to do more than to call to the recollection of the house the leading parts of the declaration of his Majesty. I mean to leave that part of the subject also without the possibility of doubt, or difference of opinion. It is certainly true, that, even previous to any of the circumstances that related to the preliminary forms of the negociation, the prior conduct of France had offered to any government that was not sincerely and most anxiously bent upon peace, sufficient ground for the continuance of hostilities; it is true that, in the former negociation at Paris, Lord Malmesbury was finally sent away, not upon a question of terms of peace, not upon a question of the cession of European or colonial possessions, but upon the haughty demand of a previous preliminary, which should give up every thing on the part of the allies, and which should leave them afterwards every thing to ask, or rather to require. It is true it closed in nearly the same insulting manner as the second mission; it is true, too, that, subsequent to that period, in the preliminaries concluded between the emperor and France, it was agreed to invite the allies of each party to a congress, which, however, was never carried into execution. It was under these circumstances that his Majesty, in the earnest desire of availing himself of that spirit of moderation which had begun to shew itself in France, determined to renew those proposals which had been before slighted and rejected; but when this step was taken, what was the conduct of those who have gained the ascendancy in France? On the first application to know on what ground they were disposed to negociate, wantonly, as will be shewn by

the sequel, and for no purpose but to prevent even the opening of the conferences, they insisted upon a mode of negociation very contrary to general usage and convenience, contrary to the mode in which they had terminated war with any of the belligerent powers, and directly contrary to any mode which they themselves afterwards persisted in following in this very negociation with us. They began by saying, they would receive no proposals for preliminaries, but that conferences should be held for the purpose of concluding at once a definitive treaty.

His Majesty's answer was, that it was his desire to adopt that mode only which was most likely to accelerate the object in view, and the powers of his plenipotentiary would apply to either object, either preliminary or definitive. They appeared content with his answer: but what was the next step? In the simple form of granting a passport for the minister, at the moment they were saying they preferred a definitive peace, because it was the most expeditious; in that very passport, which in all former times has only described the character of the minister, without entering into any thing relating to the terms or mode of negociating, they insert a condition relative to his powers, and that inconsistent with what his Majesty had explained to be the nature of the powers he had intended to give, and with which they had apparently been satisfied; they made it a passport not for a minister coming to conclude peace generally, but applicable only to a definitive and separate peace.

This proceeding was in itself liable to the most obvious objection; but it is more important, as an instance to shew how, in the simplest part of the transaction, the untractable spirit of France discovered itself; it throws light upon the subsequent part of the transaction, and shews the inconsistencies and contradictions of their successive pretensions. As to the condition then made in the passport for the first time, that the negociation should be for a separate peace, his Majesty declared that he had no choice between a definitive and a preliminary treaty, but as to a separate peace, his honour and good faith, with regard to his ally the queen of Portugal, would not permit it: he therefore

stated his unalterable determination to agree to no treaty in which Portugal should not be included, expressing, at the same time, his readiness that France should treat on the part of Holland and Spain.

On this occasion, the good faith of this country prevailed; the system of violence and despotism was not then ripe, and therefore his Majesty's demand to treat for Portugal was acquiesced in by the directory. They, at the same time, undertook to treat on their part for their allies, Holland and Spain, as well as for themselves, though, in the subsequent course of the negociation, they pretended to be without sufficient power to treat for either.

I must here entreat the attention of the house to the next circumstance which occurred. When the firmness of his Majesty, his anxious and sincere desire to terminate the horrors of war, and his uniform moderation, overcame the violence, and defeated the designs of the members of the executive government of France, they had recourse to another expedient—the most absurd as well as the most unjustifiable: they adverted to the rupture of the former negociation, as if that rupture was to be imputed to his Majesty; and this insinuation was accompanied with a personal reflection upon the minister who was sent by his Majesty to treat on the part of this country. His Majesty, looking anxiously as he did to the conclusion of peace, disdained to reply otherwise, than by observing, that this was not a fit topic to be agitated at the moment of renewing a negociation, and that the circumstances of the transaction were well enough known to Europe and to the world. And the result of this negociation has confirmed what the former had sufficiently proved, that his Majesty could not have selected, in the ample field of talents which his dominions furnish, any person better qualified to do justice to his sincere and benevolent desire, to promote the restoration of peace, and his firm and unalterable determination to maintain the dignity and honour of his kingdoms.

In spite of these obstacles, and others more minute, the British plenipotentiary at length arrived at Lisle; the full powers were transmitted to the respective governments, and were found un-

exceptionable, though the supposed defect of these full powers is, three months after, alleged as a cause for the rupture of the negociation; and what is more remarkable, it did so happen that the French full powers were, on the face of them, much more limited than ours, for they only enabled the commissioners of the directory to act according to the instructions they were to receive from time to time. On this point it is not necessary now to dwell, but I desire the house to treasure it in their memory, when we come to the question of pretence for the rupture of the negociation.

Then, Sir, I come to the point in which we have incurred the censure of the honourable baronet, for delivering in on our part a *projet*. To his opinion, I do not subscribe, for the reasons that I stated before. But can there be a stronger proof of his Majesty's sincerity, than his waving so many points important in themselves rather than suffer the negociation to be broken off? What was our situation! We were to treat with a government, that had in the outset expressed, that they would treat only definitively; and from every part of their conduct which preceded the meeting of our plenipotentiary, and their commissioners, we might have expected that they would have been prepared to answer our *projet* almost in twenty-four hours after it was delivered. We stood with respect to France in this predicament—we had nothing to ask of them, the question only was, how much we were to give of that which the valour of his Majesty's arms had acquired from them, and from their allies. In this situation, surely, we might have expected, that, before we offered the price of peace, they would at least have condescended to say what were the sacrifices which they expected us to make. But, Sir, in this situation, what species of *projet* was it that was presented by his Majesty's minister? A *projet* the most distinct, the most particular, the most conciliatory and moderate, that ever constituted the first words spoken by any negocia[illegible] t of this *projet* what have we heard in the language of the French government? What have we seen dispersed through all Europe by that press in France which knows no sentiments but what French policy dic-

tates? What have we seen dispersed by that English press which knows no other use of English liberty, but servilely to retail and transcribe French opinions? We have been told, that it was a *projet* that refused to embrace the terms of negociation. Gentlemen have read the papers—how does that fact stand? In the original *projet* we agreed to give up the conquests we had made from France and her allies, with certain exceptions. For those exceptions a blank was left, in order to ascertain whether France was desirous that the exceptions should be divided between her and her allies, or whether she continued to insist upon a complete compensation, and left England to look for compensation only to her allies. France, zealous as she pretends to be for her allies, had no difficulty in authorizing her ministers to declare, that she must retain every thing for herself. This blank was then filled up, and it was then distinctly stated, how little, out of what we had, we demanded to keep; in one sense, it remains a blank still, we did not attempt to preclude France from any other mode of filling it up; but while we stated the utmost extent of our own views, we left open to full explanation whatever points the government of France could desire. We called upon them, and repeatedly solicited them, to state something as to the nature of the terms which they proposed, if they objected to ours. It was thus left open to modification, alteration, or concession: but this is not the place, this is not the time, in which I am to discuss, whether those terms, in all given circumstances, or in the circumstances of that moment, were or were not the ultimate terms upon which peace ought to be accepted or rejected; if it were once brought to the point when an ultimatum could be judged of, I will not argue whether some great concession might not have been made with the certainty of peace, or whether the terms proposed constituted an offer of peace upon more favourable grounds for the enemy than his Majesty's ministers could justify. I argue not the one question nor the other; it would be inconsistent with the public interest and our duty, that we should here state or discuss it; all that I have to discuss, is, whether the terms, upon the face

of them, appear honourable, open, frank, distinct, sincere, and a pledge of moderation; and I leave it to the good sense of the house, whether there can exist a difference of opinion upon this point.

Sir, what was it we offered to renounce to France? In one word, all that we had taken from them. What did this consist of?—the valuable, and almost, under all circumstances, the impregnable island of Martinique, various other West India possessions, St. Lucia, Tobago, the French part of St. Domingo, the settlements of Pondicherry and Chandernagore, all the French factories and means of trade in the East Indies, and the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon; and for what were these renunciations to be made? For peace, and for peace only. And to whom? To a nation which had obtained from his Majesty's dominions in Europe nothing in the course of the war, which had never met our fleets but to add to the catalogue of our victories, and to swell the melancholy lists of their own captures and defeats.—To a power which had never separately met the arms of this country by land, but to carry the glory and prowess of the British name to a higher pitch, and to a country whose commerce is unheard of, whose navy is annihilated, whose distress, confessed by themselves, (however it may be attempted to be dissembled by their panegyrists in this or any other country,) is acknowledged by the sighs and groans of the people of France, and proved by the expostulations and remonstrances occasioned by the violent measures of his executive government.—Such was the situation in which we stood—such the situation of the enemy when we offered to make these important concessions, as the price of peace. What was the situation of the allies of France? From Spain, who, from the moment she had deserted our cause and enlisted on the part of the enemy, only added to the number of our conquests, and to her own indelible disgrace, we made claim of one island, the island of Trinidad, a claim not resting on the mere naked title of possession, to counterbalance the general European aggrandizement of France, but as the price of something that we had to give by

making good the title to the Spanish part of Saint Domingo, which Spain had ceded without right, and which cession could not be made without our guarantee. To Holland, having in our hands the whole means of their commerce, the whole source of their wealth, we offered to return almost all that was valuable and lucrative to them, in the mere consideration of commerce; we desired in return to keep what to them, in a pecuniary view would be only a burthen, in a political view worse than useless, because they had not the means to keep it; what, had we granted it, would have been a sacrifice, not to them, but to France; what would in future have enabled her to carry on her plan of subjugation against the Eastern possessions of Holland itself, as well as against those of Great Britain. All that we asked, was, not indemnification for what we had suffered, but the means of preserving our own possessions, and the strength of our naval empire; we did this at a time when our enemy was feeling the pressure of war—and who looks at the question of peace without some regard to the relative situation of the country with which you are contending? Look then at their trade; look at their means; look at the posture of their affairs; look at what we hold, and at the means we have of defending ourselves, and our enemy of resisting us, and tell me, whether this offer was or was not a proof of sincerity, and a pledge of moderation. Sir, I should be ashamed of arguing it, I confess; I am apprehensive we may have gone too far in the first proposals we made, rather than shew any backwardness in the negociation; but it is unnecessary to argue this point.

Our proposal was received and allowed by the French plenipotentiaries, and transmitted for the consideration of the Directory; months had elapsed in sending couriers weekly and daily from Paris to Lisle, and from Lisle to Paris: they taught us to expect, from time to time, a consideration of this subject, and an explicit answer to our *projet*. But the first attempt of the Directory to negociate, after having received our *projet*, is worthy of remark; they required that we, whom they had summoned to a definitive treaty, should stop and discuss preli-

minary points, which were to be settled without knowing whether, when we had agreed to them all, we had advanced one inch; we were to discuss; whether his Majesty would renounce the title of King of France, a harmless feather, at most, in the crown of England; we were to discuss, whether we would restore those ships taken at Toulon, the acquisition of valour, and which we were entitled upon every ground to hold; we were to discuss, whether we would renounce the mortgage which we might possess on the Netherlands, and which engaged much of the honourable baronet's attention: but it does so happen, that what the honourable baronet considered as so important, was of no importance at all. For a mortgage on the Netherlands, we have none, and consequently we have none to renounce; therefore, upon that condition, which they had no right to ask, and we had no means of granting, we told them them the true state of the case, and that it was not worth talking about.

The next point which occurred, is of a nature which is difficult to dwell upon without indignation; we were waiting the fulfilment of a promise which had been made repeatedly, of delivering to our ambassador a *contre-projet*, when they who had desired us to come for the purpose of concluding a definitive treaty, propose that we should subscribe as a *sine quâ non* preliminary, that we were ready, in the first instance, to consent to give up all that we had taken, and then to hear what they had farther to ask. Is it possible to suppose that such a thing could be listened to by any country that was not prepared to prostrate itself at the feet of France, and in that abject posture to adore its conqueror, to solicit new insults, to submit to demands still more degrading and ignominious, and to cancel at once the honour of the British name? His Majesty had no hesitation in refusing to comply with such insolent and unwarrantable demands. Here again the house will see, that the spirit of the violent part of the French government, which had the insolence to advance this proposition, had not acquired power and strength in that state of the negociation to adhere to it;

his Majesty's explanations and remonstrances for a time prevailed, and an interval ensued, in which we had a hope, that we were advancing to a pacification. His Majesty's refusal of this demand was received by the French plenipotentiaries with assurances of a pacific disposition, was transmitted to their government, and was seconded by a continued and repeated repetition of promises, that a *contre-projet* should be presented, pretending that they were under the necessity of sending to their allies an account of what passed; and that they were endeavouring to prevail on them to accede to proposals for putting an end to the calamities of war—to terminate the calamities of that war into which those allies were forced, in which they were retained by France alone, and in which they purchased nothing but sacrifices to France, and misery to themselves. We were told, indeed, in a conference that followed, that they had obtained an answer, but that not being sufficiently satisfactory, it was sent back to be considered. This continued, during the whole period, until that dreadful catastrophe of the 4th of September: even after that event, the same pretence was held out; they peremptorily promised the *contre-projet* in four days: the same pacific professions were renewed, and our minister was assured, that the change of circumstances in France should not be a bar to the pacification. Such was the uniform language of the plenipotentiaries in the name of the government—how it is proved by their actions I have already stated to the house. After this series of professions, what was the first step taken to go on with the negociation in this spirit of conciliation? Sir, the first step was to renew, as his Majesty's declaration has well stated, in a shape still more offensive, the former inadmissible and rejected demand; the rejection of which had been acquiesced in by themselves two months before, and during all which time, we had been impatiently waiting for the performance of their promises. That demand was the same that I have already stated in substance, that Lord Malmesbury should explain to them, not only his powers, but also his instructions; and they asked not for the formal extent of his

power, which would give solidity to what he might conclude in the king's name, but they asked an irrevocable pledge, that he would consent to give up all that we had taken from them and from their allies, without knowing how much more they had afterwards to ask. It is true they endeavoured to convince Lord Malmesbury, that although an avowal of his instructions was demanded, it would never be required that he should act upon it, for there was a great difference between knowing the extent of the powers of a minister, and insisting upon their exercise. And here I would ask the honourable baronet, whether he thinks, if, in the first instance, we had given up all to the French plenipotentiaries, they would have given it all back again to us? Suppose I was ambassador from the French Directory, and the honourable baronet was ambassador from Great Britain, and I were to say to him, "Will you give up all you have gained? It would only be a handsome thing in you, as an Englishman, and no ungenerous use shall be made of it;" would the honourable baronet expect me, as a French ambassador, to say, "I am instructed, from the good nature of the Directory, to say, you have acted handsomely, and I now return you what you have so generously given?" Should we not be called children and drivellers, if we could act in this manner? and indeed the French government could be nothing but children and drivellers, if they could suppose that we should have acceded to such a proposal.—But they are bound, it seems, by sacred treaties; they are bound by immutable laws; they are sworn when they make peace, to return every thing to their allies; and who shall require of France for the safety of Europe, to depart from its own pretensions to honour and independence?

If any person can really suppose that this country could have agreed to such a proposition, or that such a negociation was likely to lead to a good end, all I can say is, that with such a man I will not argue. I leave others to imagine what was likely to have been the end of a negociation, in which it was to have been settled as a preliminary, that you were to give up all that you have gained; and when, on the side of your enemy, not a

word was said of what he had to propose afterwards. They demand of your ambassador to shew to them not only his powers, but also his instructions, before they explain a word of theirs; and they tell you too, that you are never to expect to hear what their powers are, until you shall be ready to concede every thing which the Directory may think fit to require. This is certainly the substance of what they propose; and they tell you also, that they are to carry on the negociation from the instructions which their plenipotentiaries are to receive from time to time from them. You are to have no power to instruct your ambassador; you are to shew to the enemy at once all you have in view, and they will only tell you from time to time, as to them shall seem meet, what demands they shall make.

It was thus it was attempted, on the part of the French, to commence the negociation. In July, this demand was made to Lord Malmesbury. He stated, that his powers were ample. In answer to this, they went no farther than to say, that if he had no such power as what they required, he should send to England to obtain it. To which he replied, that he had not, nor should he have it if he sent. In this they acquiesce, and attempt to amuse us for two months. At the end of that time, the plenipotentiaries say to Lord Malmesbury, not what they said before, send to England for power to accede to proposals which you have already rejected; but go to England yourself for such powers, in order to obtain peace.

Such was the winding up of the negociation; such was the way in which the prospect of peace has been disappointed by the conduct of France; and I must look upon the dismissal of Lord Malmesbury as the last stage of the negociation, because the undisguised insult by which it was pretended to be kept up for ten days after Lord Malmesbury was sent away, was really below comment. You (France) send him to ask for those powers which you were told he had not, and in the refusal of which, you acquiesced: you have asked as a preliminary, that which is monstrous and exorbitant; that preliminary you were told would not be complied with, and yet the performance of that preliminary you

made the *sine quâ non* condition of his return! Such was the last step by which the French government has shewn that it had feeling enough left to think it necessary to search for some pretext to colour its proceedings; but they are such proceedings that no pretext or artifice can cover them, as will appear more particularly from the papers officially communicated to the house.

But here the subject does not rest: if we look to the whole complexion of this transaction, the duplicity, the arrogance, and violence which has appeared in the course of the negociation, if we take from thence our opinion of its general result, we shall be justified in our conclusion, not that the people of France, not that the whole government of France, but that that part of the goverment which had too much influence, and has now the whole ascendancy, never was sincere; was determined to accept of no terms but such as would make it neither durable nor safe, such as could only be accepted by this country by a surrender of all its interests, and by a sacrifice of every pretension to the character of a great, a powerful, or an independent nation.

This, Sir, is inference no longer, you have their own open avowal; you have it stated in the subsequent declaration of France itself, that it is not against your commerce, that it is not against your wealth, it is not against your possessions in the east, or colonies in the west, it is not against even the source of your maritime greatness, it is not against any of the appendages of your empire, but against the very essence of your liberty, against the foundation of your independence, against the citadel of your happiness, against your constitution itself, that their hostilities are directed. They have themselves announced and proclaimed the proposition, that what they mean to bring with their invading army is the genius of *their* liberty: I desire no other word to express the subversion of the British constitution,—and the substitution of the most malignant and fatal contrast,—and the annihilation of British liberty, and the obliteration of every thing that has rendered you a great, a flourishing, and a happy people.

This is what is at issue; for this are we to declare ourselves in a manner that deprecates the rage which our enemy will not dissemble, and which will be little moved by our entreaty. Under such circumstances are we ashamed or afraid to declare, in a firm and manly tone, our resolution to defend ourselves, or to speak the language of truth with the energy that belongs to Englishmen united in such a cause? Sir, I do not scruple for one to say, if I knew nothing by which I could state to myself a probability of the contest terminating in our favour, I would maintain, that the contest with its worst chances is preferable to an acquiescence in such demands.

If I could look at this as a dry question of prudence, if I could calculate it upon the mere grounds of interest, I would say, if we love that degree of national power which is necessary for the independence of the country, and its safety; if we regard domestic tranquillity, if we look at individual enjoyment, from the highest to the meanest among us, there is not a man, whose stake is so great in the country, that he ought to hesitate a moment in sacrificing any portion of it to oppose the violence of the enemy; nor is there, I trust, a man in this happy and free nation, whose stake is so small, that he would not be ready to sacrifice his life in the same cause. If we look at it with a view to safety, this would be our conduct; but if we look at it upon the principle of true honour, of the character which we have to support, of the example which we have to set to the other nations of Europe, if we view rightly the lot in which Providence has placed us, and the contrast between ourselves and all the other countries in Europe, gratitude to that Providence should inspire us to make every effort in such a cause. There may be danger, but on the one side there is danger accompanied with honour; on the other side, there is danger with indelible shame and disgrace; upon such an alternative, Englishmen will not hesitate. I wish to disguise no part of my sentiments upon the grounds on which I put the issue of the contest. I ask, whether up to the principles I have stated, we are prepared to act? Having done so, my opinion is not altered, my hopes however are animated

from the reflection that the means of our safety are in our own hands; for there never was a period when we had more to encourage us; in spite of heavy burdens, the radical strength of the nation never shewed itself more conspicuous; its revenue never exhibited greater proofs of the wealth of the country; the same objects, which constitute the blessings we have to fight for, furnish us with the means of continuing them. But it is not upon that point I rest it; there is one great resource, which I trust will never abandon us, and which has shone forth in the English character, by which we have preserved our existence and fame, as a nation, which I trust we shall be determined never to abandon under any extremity, but shall join hand and heart in the solemn pledge that is proposed to us, and declare to his Majesty, that we know great exertions are wanting, that we are prepared to make them, and at all events determined to stand or fall by the laws, liberties, and religion of our country.

The amendment was afterwards withdrawn, and the original address passed *nemine contradicente*.

November 24, 1797.

The House having resolved itself into a Committee of Supply, Mr. Pitt rose and addressed the committee to the following purport:

In pursuance of the intimation which I gave upon a former day, I now rise to state to the committee the general outline of the measures which are proposed as the foundations for raising the supplies, and for meeting the exigencies of the ensuing year. As the principle of that part of the intended plan to which I am most desirous to direct the attention of the committee is new in the financial operations of this country, at least for more than a century; as it is a principle so important in its nature, and so extensive in its consequences, it is not my intention to call for any

decision upon its merit in the present stage of the business. All that I now mean to state to the committee, I wish to be considered merely as a notice, and a general explanation of a plan that is afterwards to be brought forward. Any minute consideration and particular dispositions I shall omit till the subject is submitted to a detailed discussion, and content myself with a general view of the object proposed, and a general outline of the mode by which it is to be carried into execution. After the facts which are already in your possession, after the unanimous resolution which the two houses of parliament have passed upon the subject, it would be unnecessary for me to dwell upon the causes which demand your exertions, and the nature of the objects, which the supplies you are called upon to provide are intended to secure. The question which you have to consider is of no less importance than by what means you are to provide for the expenses which will be necessary to enable you successfully to resist the avowed intentions of an arrogant foe, to destroy your liberties and constitution, to cut off the sources of your wealth, your prosperity, your independence, and your glory. In pledging ourselves to withstand these haughty pretensions, and to defend the blessings we enjoy, we have not acted lightly. In expressing our determination to support the honour and the interest of the country at every hazard, we spoke equally the dictates of sober reflection, and the language of indignant feeling; our judgment was in concord with our ardour; we declared ourselves ready to meet the difficulty in its fullest extent, and prepared to support our resolution at every extremity. I wish to be understood, therefore, that it is upon these principles, that the plan which I am now about to explain is founded. I know that it is upon these principles, that parliament and the nation have pledged themselves to act; by these principles, and these only, the measures which are to be submitted to your consideration have been framed, and it is upon these principles that their propriety ought to be judged.

Before I proceed to enter more largely into the principles of the plan which it is my intention to propose, I shall briefly take

a view of the amount of the expenses for which it will be necessary to provide. These I shall state under the usual heads, avoiding in the present stage of the business, all minute details, and considering only the amount of the supplies which will be required.

I shall begin, then, with the sums that will be necessary for the service of the navy. The committee will recollect that there has already been voted for this branch, the sum of 12,539,000*l.* It will likewise be recollected, that the estimates of the present year have been made out in a new form, intended, with greater correctness than formerly, to present a full view of all the expense that would be necessary. Instead of the former allowance of 4*l.* per month, which was found to be inadequate, the full expense has been taken into view. Even in their present shape the estimates are not to be considered as so accurate as to exclude the possibility of any excess. All that can be said is, that they are now more likely than at any former period to include the whole of the expense which this branch of the service may demand. The amount voted, then, for this article is 12,539,000*l.* It is unnecessary here to specify the different heads of this branch; all that is requisite is, to point out the whole of the expense which we are called upon to devise measures to supply. Besides this sum, there will be a sum of navy debt, owing to the excess of last year above the estimate, amounting to three millions. This, however, will form no part of the expense for which it will now be requisite to make a cash provision. It will only be requisite to provide a sum equal to the interest; and in the present state of the funds, that provision cannot be calculated at less than 250,000*l.* By a regulation adopted last year to prevent the depreciation of navy and exchequer bills, by providing that the period of payment should never be very distant from their date, there will be on their monthly issue of 500,000*l.* a floating debt of 1,500,000*l.* to be funded, arising out of the excess of the estimates for the year 1797. There will likewise be a similar sum of 1,500,000*l.* falling due in the year 1799; but for these no cash provision will be necessary, nor are they included in the

supplies to be raised. The sum of 12,539,000*l.* is all that enters into the account of the supplies under this branch for the ensuing year.

The expense for the army, excepting only barracks and extraordinaries, has likewise been voted. What the amount of the extraordinaries will be, it is impossible to ascertain; but so far as can be collected from the bills already drawn, this article may be taken at four millions besides the vote of credit, making an excess of about 1,300,000*l.* at the end of the year.

In judging of the probable amount of the demands of this branch of service for the year 1798, it will be seen that there is no prospect of increase at home; that the situation of the war abroad promises to admit of a diminution; and that from the general state of affairs, many of the causes, which contributed to swell the extraordinaries of the army, cease to operate. The amount of the extraordinaries, then, may be taken at 2,500,000*l.* The charge on the head of barracks may be estimated at 400,000*l.* The expense of guards and garrisons, and the general articles included under this head, has already been voted, amounting to 10,112,000*l.* The ordnance may be taken at 1,300,000*l.* and the various articles of miscellaneous service may be rated at 673,000*l.* There remain only two articles to be noticed, the sum of 200,000*l.* appropriated for the reduction of the national debt, and about 680,000*l.* arising from deficiencies of grants. From the whole, then, the committee will see, that the sum now to be provided for amounts to about twenty-five millions and a half. Supposing the statements under the head of the army and navy to be correct, the expense on these branches will be reduced to the extent of two millions and a half; and, including the reduction on the head of extraordinaries, the saving upon the whole will amount to the sum of 6,700,000*l.*

Notwithstanding this diminution, however, there still remains the sum of twenty-five millions and a half to be provided for, as the supplies of the ensuing year. Before I proceed to explain the general plan proposed for covering this expense, I shall state

the usual articles which compose part of the annual ways and means.

These are the growing produce of the consolidated fund, and the land and malt. The former I shall take, along with the profit on the lottery, at so very small a sum as 700,000*l.* making with the land and malt the sum of three millions and a half. There still remains, however, the sum of twenty-two millions to be supplied by some other means. The mode by which this sum is to be raised, forms the great object of consideration. The reduction upon the head of naval and military establishment does, indeed, amount to a very considerable saving. The committee will see with satisfaction that their expenses admit of a diminution below what was necessary in some former periods of the war. Pleasing as this circumstance certainly is, I will not disguise, however, that after the sums which have already been added to the national debt, after the burdens which have already been imposed, to raise so large a sum as twenty-two millions, is no light matter. But the difficulty is to be examined with a firm determination to exert every effort which the magnitude of the occasion demands, with a firm determination to produce the means by which the struggle is to be supported with vigour and with effect, so long as these continue to be the only course by which we can maintain our national honour, and secure our national safety. After this decided resolution, to render these supplies effective, the next point to be considered is the mode by which the expense is to be defrayed, without danger to the sources of our prosperity, and without inconvenience to those who may be called upon to contribute.

Before I enter into the statement of that plan by which it is proposed to meet a considerable part of this expense in a manner rather new in our more recent financial operations, I shall mention one of the intended supplies which, under the restriction with which it will be guarded, I am disposed to think will be viewed as altogether unexceptionable. After what I have heard from some gentlemen on former discussions, I cannot expect

that the measure to which I allude will encounter no opposition; but I am pretty confident that though not universal, the approbation which it will receive will be very general. This measure, however, is considerably different from that which some gentlemen conceive. I propose that towards the supplies the bank shall make an advance to government. The sum which it is in contemplation thus to raise is neither very large in itself, nor will it be made in such a shape as to deprive the bank of the certainty of repayment within a short period, if it shall be considered expedient to take off the restriction on payment in cash. That under all the circumstances of our present situation that restriction is necessary, I cannot entertain a doubt. I confess, that, while the war continues in its present shape, it is my decided opinion that it would be unwise to discontinue that restriction. If, however, any unforeseen events of the war, or if the return of peace should supersede that necessity, the advances, which it is proposed should be made by the bank, are to be upon such conditions as shall render them available for the payment of their debt. If such a measure should meet with the approbation of parliament, the bank will consent to make the advance. If it is clear, then, that in the present situation of affairs the restriction is prudent, if, under the conditions intended to be stipulated with regard to the manner of repayment, this advance will be attended with advantage to the public service without any detriment to the bank, I am at a loss to discover why we should decline an accommodation which, in the present circumstances of the country, would prove so material a relief. The sum of three millions, then, the bank will agree to advance on exchequer bills, to be repaid at a short period, capable of being prolonged if nothing occur to render that extension inexpedient, but still claimable by the bank if any change in their affairs shall render it necessary.

There now remains to be supplied the sum of nineteen millions. According to the received system of our financial operations, the natural and ordinary mode of providing this sum would be by a loan. I know that, notwithstanding the magnitude of

the debt already accumulated, resources are still left for supplying the public service by this means. I admit the funding system, which has been so long the established mode of supplying the public wants, though I cannot but regret the extent to which it has been carried, is not yet exhausted. If we look, however, at the general diffusion of wealth, and the great accumulation of capital; above all, if we consider the hopes which the enemy have conceived of wearying us out by the embarrassments of the funding system, we shall find that the true mode of preparing ourselves to maintain the contest with effect and success, is to reduce the advantages which the funding system is calculated to afford within due limits, and to prevent the depreciation of our national securities. We ought to consider how far the efforts we shall exert to preserve the blessings we enjoy, will enable us to transmit the inheritance to posterity unincumbered with those burdens which would cripple their vigour, which would prevent them from asserting that rank in the scale of nations which their ancestors so long and so gloriously maintained. It is in this point of view that the subject ought to be considered. Whatever objections might have been fairly urged against the funding system in its origin, no man can suppose that, after the form and shape which it has given to our financial affairs, after the heavy burdens which it has left behind it, we can now recur to the notion of raising in one year the whole of the supplies which a scale of expense, so extensive as ours, must require. If such a plan is evidently impracticable, some medium, however, may be found to draw as much advantage from the funding system, as it is fit, consistently with a due regard for posterity, to employ, and at the same time to obviate the evils with which its excess would be attended. We still may devise some expedient by which we may contribute to the defence of our own cause, and to the supply of our own exigencies, by which we may reduce within equitable limits the accommodation of the funding system, and lay the foundation of that quick redemption which will prevent the dangerous consequences of an overgrown accumulation of our public debt.

Such are the advantages which the plan I am about to propose endeavours to combine. To guard against the accumulation of the funded debt, and to contribute that share to the support of the struggle in which we are engaged, which our ability will permit without inconvenience to those who are called upon to contribute, appears essentially necessary. The great object of such a practical scheme must be to allot fairly and equally to every class that portion which each ought to bear. As I have already stated then, it is my intention to propose, not for your immediate decision, but for your mature deliberation, the plan of raising, by a general tax within the year, the sum of seven millions. I am aware that this sum does far exceed any thing which has been raised at any former period at one time, but I trust I have stated sufficient reasons to shew that it is a wise and necessary measure. I am sure that whatever temporary sacrifices it may be necessary to make, the committee will feel that they can best provide for the ultimate success of the struggle, by shewing that they are determined to be guided by no personal considerations, that, while they defend the present blessings they enjoy, they are not regardless of posterity. If the sacrifices required be considered in this view; if they be taken in reference to the objects for which we contend, and the evils which we are labouring to avert, great as they may be compared with former exertions, they must appear very light in the balance.

It will be observed, that there will be twelve millions out of the eighteen still to be provided for in the way of loan. At present I state this circumstance merely in the cursory review I have taken of the whole supplies. In what manner it will be done must depend upon the views which the progress of affairs may afterwards suggest. Certain parts of this sum would probably be raised on different terms. Whatever part of it might be covered by the produce of the sinking fund may be borrowed as permanent debt, providing for its redemption on the same terms with the other permanent debt; other parts again may be borrowed upon a much earlier scheme of redemption. But to pro-

ceed to the mode by which it is proposed to raise this sum of seven millions.

It has been understood for a considerable time that a great increase of the assessed taxes was in agitation. I shall state the reasons why this branch of the revenue has been chosen as best calculated to combine the advantages, which I have already explained as desirable in the intended plan. The objects to be attained in the mode of executing this scheme are threefold. One great point is, that the plan should be diffused as extensively as possible; that it should be regulated as fairly and equally as possible, without the necessity of such an investigation of property as the customs, the manners, and the pursuits of the people would render odious and vexatious. That it should exclude those who are least able to contribute or furnish means of relief; that it should distinguish the gradation of classes: that it should admit of those abatements which, in particular instances, it might be prudent to make in the portion of those who might be liable under its general principles. I am aware that no measure can be devised adequately to provide for all these objects in all their details and in every particular instance. No scheme can be practically carried into execution, in any financial arrangement, much more in such a one as the present, with such perfect dispositions as to guard against every possible inconvenience, and to render every individual application unexceptionable. These general principles, however, must be kept in view in every practical plan, and the great question in discussion will be, whether any means of apportioning the extent of the contribution can be found, better calculated to preserve them entire than the provisi ons which I propose contain. It will at once occur that the taxes, known by the name of assessed, include so many objects different in their nature, so many objects in the present state of society, of real necessity, so many of optional use and of luxury, so diversified by modes and by the state of families, that in general nothing can afford a better test of expenditure than the way in which these taxes are combined. One great objection, that the poor

who contribute to the assessed taxes yet may be entitled to be exempted from such a contribution as the present, will thus be obviated in a striking manner. Those who contribute to the assessed taxes compose a number of about 7 or 800,000 housekeepers and masters of families, including a population of nearly four millions, on whom the sum will be raised. Who then are those who will be entitled to exemption? Those who already are not included at all, on account of their poverty, or those who, for the same reason, are discharged from payment. Whether this description includes the artificers and labourers who have a fair claim to exemption, there is at least reason to believe, from the best information that can be collected, that 500,000 housekeepers and masters of families, covering a population of between two and three millions, are so comprehended. Such is the extent of the total exemption.

The next object then is, to consider the effect of the contribution upon those classes on which it would be raised. The assessed taxes so far as can be ascertained, amount to a sum of about 2,700,000*l.* This sum as collected is levied on about 7 or 800,000 housekeepers, of whom it is ascertained that 400,000 do not contribute more than 150,000*l.* This, indeed, is a little increased by the late additions, but in a very small proportion, as these additions chiefly affect those who belong to the superior classes. The proposed additional assessment, then, upon the whole contributors, would amount, on the whole sum of the assessed taxes, to something less than a treble contribution. Why it should be something less than treble, which would be about eight millions, will be explained in the sequel. When we see that 400,000 householders contribute only 150,000*l.* we shall see how small a part of the additional share will fall upon those who are most entitled to mitigation. In this extensive apportionment, too, we shall discover the modifications which it may be necessary to make, and the means to adapt it to the ability of the contributors. The assessed taxes obviously divide themselves into two classes. Those which in a great measure applied to inhabited houses, consisted of three duties; that which was known by the name of the old duty,

the window duty, and the commutation duty, first imposed last war, and regulated in 1788: and of the different per cents. since imposed, which may amount to about 1,400,000*l.* out of two millions and a half. In this both the high and the low classes were included; but among the latter, 400,000*l.* contributed only 150,000*l.* The other consists of optional consumptions and luxury—the duty on servants, carriages, horses for pleasure, and that class of horses employed in agriculture, the proprietors of whom, in the present state of the country, one of the most opulent classes which it contains, could not be injured by such an addition to the moderate rate which is now paid. It will readily occur that, where there are houses which do not contribute for the optional, or class of luxury, there the inhabitant must be best entitled to favour and mitigation. On these, then, the burden will fall much more lightly than on those, such as ourselves, and those who contribute to both divisions of the assessed taxes. There is another distinction likewise which will increase the facility of applying the relief, which it may be found proper to bestow. The house tax in the metropolis and other great towns, is more felt by the inferior classes than it is felt by the same class in the country. Persons in the same circumstances of life, who in the country pay only perhaps 2*l.* in towns may pay three or four times that amount. It is the advantage of this plan then, that it will be in the power of the committee to make the contribution bear upon those who are best able to pay, and diminish the burden of those who are best entitled to relief. It forms another characteristic advantage of the plan, that the relief which it may be expedient to give to the poor, will not materially affect the productiveness of the tax. There is reason to believe, from the best estimate that can be formed, that not more than 3 or 400,000*l.* is raised in all the metropolis. This includes, indeed, all who are entitled to relief, but it likewise includes all those who are best able to pay. If great cities and populous towns contain a great number who, from their poverty, have a claim to exemption, they contain likewise a great proportion of the opulent class, who will be

able to contribute in such a manner as to supply what it would be unfair to exact from the inferior class. Thus the two classes together will supply what is required without oppression to the poor, or defalcation of the tax. In this manner, following the gradations of ability, as they are clearly pointed out by the profits of voluntary or luxurious contribution, and the claims to relief, as they are ascertained by the nature of the taxes which individuals already pay, the full amount will be fairly collected, and the burden justly distributed. In this way the first class of contribution will, on the whole, double the amount of what is already paid, though in some cases it may be more than double, in others considerably less. In this way 2,800,000*l.* may be obtained. Upon that class which comprehends the taxes on servants, pleasure horses, carriages, &c. it is proposed to treble the assessment. In the higher classes, where the quantity of assessed taxes may be considered as a fair criterion of opulence, the rate of contribution may in some cases be an addition of three and a half, and even, in the highest class of all, a quadruple of the present tax.

On the second description, there may be obtained about 3,900,000*l.* at the treble rate. Allowing 500,000*l.* for the highest class, the produce with the 2,800,000*l.* for the first class, makes more than 7,000,000*l.* If it were trebled on the whole, the produce would be more than 8,000,000*l.* but it will now be sufficiently understood, that, from the modifications which it will be expedient to introduce, in many cases, instead of double there will not be one rate, in some not one half rate, and others still less, to be exacted. Thus, from the treble allotment, there will be nearly one million to be divided in modification to alleviate the burdens of those whom it may be wise to exempt. In this manner each class will mutually contribute to the relief of those who are unable to sustain an additional burden, and the 400,000 who now pay so small a proportion will continue to be protected from any severe exaction by the extent which the tax will receive from the more opulent class of contributors.

Thus the advantage of such an arrangement will allow suffi-

cient latitude of relief where relief should be given without diminishing the productiveness of the tax. It will allow any exemption to those who have *no means*, not to those who are *unwilling* to contribute; of the former there may be many in number, but little in amount; of the latter, whatever the amount may be, I am sure the numbers will be few. I am sure that there cannot be a large proportion of men in any part of this country who will be unwilling to concur in those measures which are felt so necessary for the public safety, or who can refuse to contribute a part of their property for the preservation of all they possess. In such a cause no man can find the extent of his contribution limited, but by the extent of his ability. In every class where the means exceed the actual necessity; in every case where the power of contribution exceeds the absolute demand, no man can surely be so unmindful of the duties he owes to his country, no man can be so blind to the interests he has to preserve, as not to feel that he makes the most frugal and generous option in contributing to defend the society, of which he forms a component part, and to maintain that station which he occupies. I am aware that I anticipate the wishes of every man who hears me, in thus proposing that the extent of the relief, which the poor will receive, will be defrayed by the rate of contribution varying with the property and the stake which men hold in the country, by attaching upon the same class with ourselves the additional burdens which the poverty of the lower classes will improve. In thus affording a proof of the sincerity of the pledge we have given by our readiness to make the sacrifices which it requires, I feel that I am equally in unison with the general sentiment of the committee, as with the great principles of policy and of justice. Speaking for ourselves, we thus disclaim every little jealousy of the extent of the burden we are called upon to bear. We prove to the world that we are not limited by this or that contribution; we demonstrate that we calculate only the magnitude of the occasion, and consider only whether the effort be equal to the importance of the demand. I trust that the exertion will not be deficient, that the contribution

will not be inadequate; but if it were found to be below the unexampled greatness of the cause, I am sure that the utomst alacrity would be shewn to submit to still greater sacrifices, and to display more vigorous efforts. We have the satisfaction of knowing that, however heavy these burdens might be, if permanent, yet as temporary sacrifices they are light in the scale when weighed against this mighty crisis and extremity of defence, when compared with the horrors we have to shun, and the value of the blessings we have to preserve. If I am not deceived in the inquiries I have made, the greatest contribution will not exceed a tenth of the income of the highest class of those by whom it is paid. No man surely will think such a sacrifice too great for such a cause; he cannot think advantages too dearly purchased, if the effect of our preparation be to discourage the extravagant pretensions of the enemy, to dissipate the vain hopes they have built on our supposed financial embarrassments, to animate confidence at home, to confirm the solidity of our power, and to maintain the sources of our prosperity.

Having thus explained the general nature of the plan proposed, I must not omit to suggest the precautions which will be necessary to prevent the contribution from being eluded on the one hand by a subsequent diminution of establishment, and on the other to make provision that a real change of circumstances may not expose individuals to an oppressive exaction. It is evident, however, that in order to make the tax productive, it must proceed on a past, not on a future assessment. For, Sir, every gentleman must feel, that if for the period this contribution is to be levied upon the people, the share each individual is to contribute, were to be regulated by future assessments, a great part of the benefit there is now reason to expect we shall derive from it, would be frittered away by concealment and evasion. It is, therefore, my purpose to propose, that not future but past assessments shall be made the basis of the new contribution; because, *prima facie*, the most impartial evidence that can be obtained of the ability of each individual to contribute to the exigencies of the state, is the amount of his expenditure of income before he

has any temptation to lower it, in order to elude taxation. On the other hand, Sir, as cases may exist of some, who by accidental causes are rendered unable to support their present establishment; of others, who, having improvidently engaged in them, repent of their imprudence, and desire to return to a situation better adapted to their real circumstances; and of others, who, though able to pay their present assessments, can shew themselves, by the proportion they bear to their income, to be unable to bear the additional weight of the new contributions, it is my intention, when the whole shall come in detail before the house, to propose regulations for the relief of such persons, to be digested and modified in the best manner which so complicated a subject will admit. But while provisions of this kind are to be made in favour of those upon whom the assessment would be too severely felt, the house will foresee that it will be impossible, with any regard to the great and important object in view, to suffer the tax to be evaded by those who, not deficient in ability, but wanting in inclination, to contribute to the necessities of their country, would abandon the establishments to which they have been accustomed, and diminish their expenditure, in order to avoid the tax. But if it be found that, in point of fact, they shall have resigned their establishments from inability to maintain them; and if they follow up that resignation with a declaration to be prescribed for the purpose, that the increased assessments would amount to more than a certain proportion, to be regulated on a future day, of their whole income, then they shall be entitled to relief. Sir, I am aware, that, though the house and the nation will, with few exceptions, concur with me in this, there will not be wanting those who will cavil at this mitigating provision, and allege that it will amount in its effects to a compulsory disclosure of property; but the house will immediately see that it falls short of that, and will view it in its true aspect, that is to say, as a provision intended to qualify, to mitigate, or to prevent any severity or injury that may arise to individuals from the difficulty, or rather the utter impracticability of drawing a precise line of demarkation between those who,

on account of the property they possess are bound, and those who, from inferior circumstances, are unable to contribute to a supply for the exigencies of the state: no man can say that such a provision, coming with the effects of relief, is a hardship, and I am sure no man can say that the tax would be efficient without it. These, Sir, are the outlines of the plan which I mean to offer to the consideration of the house in more minute detail upon a future day. If, when the whole has been examined, it shall meet the concurrence of, and be adopted by, the house, it will be found disengaged from many difficulties, embarrassments, and expenses, that lie in the way of other modes of taxation; for, Sir, the execution of it will entirely depend upon laws now existing, laws long in force, laws familiar to those who will be the objects of its provisions. To enforce it, no new power will be delegated, no new office created, no new expenses incurred.

Sir, I am aware that in contemplating a system of finance which professes to make property the basis of its assessments, and to be as diffusively, as generally, and as equally, levied as circumstances will admit, an idea will naturally suggest itself to every one, as it has to myself—I mean that assessed taxes, however differently apportioned to the circumstances of different persons, and however certainly they may attach on persons of opposite descriptions, are often eluded by a particular description of men of large property; you will see I mean those men who possess large capitals, and who by denying themselves many of the enjoyments of life, hoard up money, and exclude themselves from assessment. How much this applies to the subject in consideration I will not now discuss, since it certainly applies no more to this than to a former mode of taxation; for I know no act to make property the subject of taxation, while it is not rendered conducive to the pleasure or convenience, or rendered visible by the optional expenditure of the person who possesses it. If this objection has never stood in the way of taxation before, I am at a loss to suppose how it can be made an objection to this, and shall be extremely obliged to any gentleman who will point

out a mode by which property so held in hand can be subjected to taxation or assessment. The proportion this class of individuals bears to the mass of the taxable part of the nation, is not sufficiently great to add any weight to the objection if it were made; and I submit it to the feelings and wisdom of the committee, whether, in a case of urgency and importance like the present, nine-tenths of the community shall refuse to contribute to the support, the preservation, the existence, of the state, because no means can be found to compel the remaining tenth to contribute also. Undoubtedly if it be now necessary to make great contributions instead of incurring a large mass of new debt, and if that be the best mode of carrying on the war, it would be greatly advantageous to be able to get at some mode of assessing all property in all individuals; and so far it is to be lamented that the description of people of which I speak cannot be made subject to an assessment. But if, on the other hand, we can flatter ourselves, as I own I do, with the hopes of being relieved sometime from that necessity, then, even though the hoards of the penurious elude our search, it by no means follows that the nation will receive no profit from them; for, on a general plan, though utterly inactive in the expenditure of the possessors, they become active in some other shape, or in other hands, and always find their level in the course of successive ages: so that though the scrutiny to pry into wealth may for a time be baffled, the effects of that scrutiny never fail to be produced by time. If, however, I saw the means, or could suppose that means might be devised, by which such capitals could be made productive and useful to the state in way of revenue, I do assure the committee I should consider it an object too important at this time to be neglected; though I still consider them as making a part of the strength of the country upon the average principles of general resources. Yet, Sir, we might flatter ourselves that, independent of that compulsory power which the condition of such property denies us, a due proportion of it would, at least in some cases, be forthcoming at the solicitation of self-interest and self-defence; for if this is a time, as I contend it is, when the people

of this country are called upon not to contemplate their wealth only for its enjoyment, not to indulge in prejudices, or opinions, or in doubtful speculations, but to take measures for the preservation of their existence now, and their security in future, and that for this purpose we are calling for money, not to be raised by loan with interest, to remain a heavy burden on those who are to follow us, but by demand on capital, then ought the hoards of the penurious to be opened; then should those who, devoted to accumulation by ignorance of enjoyment, and early habits of frugality, have arisen from the lower rank and meanest employments, by rigid frugality and indefatigable industry, protected, fostered, and encouraged, by that happy system of government, and those equal laws, which enabled them and permits any man to emerge from the bottom to the top of society, and who, in contemplating their possessions, can scarcely have a hope but that of transmitting to their posterity those blessings and comforts they deny themselves—then ought they, I say, for the recollection of the benefits they have received, and for the sake of those to which they look forward, to consider themselves above all men bound to come forward, in defence of that system which afforded encouragement to their labours, nurture to their industry, vigour to their pursuits, and protection to their persons, their property, and their acquisitions; then ought such men to reflect, if they have the means, that this is the occasion on which they should come forward; then ought they, who have an interest so great in the country, to see that though it is impracticable to compel them, it is at least necessary for them to contribute, and that the necessity of the times is the most urgent, as well as the best of all compulsions; and come forward, not only uncompelled, but unsolicited, to offer their contribution. That some will have this feeling, and act upon it, I will not doubt—that all will do so, I am not so sanguine as to expect; but though they should neither come forward voluntarily, nor be subject to coercion, that can hardly be stated as an objection to the plan, unless something more unexceptionable can be presented in its place.

Then, Sir, there remains another, and a leading consideration. I have already stated the grounds on which I build my plan for raising seven millions of the nineteen that are necessary for the supply of the year. This leaves, as I have before mentioned, a sum of twelve millions to be raised by loan. And here a point, separate, indeed, in its nature, but not less important in its consequences, properly claims your attention. I have stated that the sum of seven millions, to be levied in a direct way by increased assessments, is intended to make the quantum of the loan more moderate. But I shall now state another principle which would lay the security, the credit, the efficient powers, and the resources of the country on a firm and immoveable foundation—a principle that will tend not to effect a diminution of our burdens for the present, but to prevent an accumulation of them for the future. The house will recollect that, by means of the sinking fund, we had advanced far in the reduction of the national debt previous to the loans necessarily made in the present war, and every year was attended with such accelerated salutary effects as outran the most sanguine calculation. But having done so, we have yet far to go as things are circumstanced, if the reduction of the debt be confined to the operations of that fund, and the expenses of the war continue to impede our plans of economy: we shall have far to go before the operation of that fund, even under the influence of peace, can be expected to counteract the effects of the war. Yet there are means by which, I am confident, it would be practicable in not many years to restore our resources, and put the country in a state equal to all exigencies. It is impossible, Sir, but we must feel ourselves bound by duty, if we wanted the encouragement of success, to proceed in the business, and to complete the work which has already had so much success, and even to provide, if it shall be found expedient or necessary, for more rapidly accomplishing that desirable object. Not only, Sir, do I think that the principle is wise, and the attempt practicable, to provide large supplies out of the direct taxes of the year, but I conceive it to be equally wise, and not less practicable,

to make provision for the amount of the debt incurred and funded in the same year; and if the necessity of carrying on the war shall entail upon us the necessity of contracting another debt, the principle I have in view is such, that, with the assistance of the sinking fund to co-operate, we shall not owe more than at the beginning. I cannot, indeed, take upon me to say, that the war will not stop the progress of the plan of liquidation; but if the means to which I look be adopted, it will leave us at least stationary—it will leave us where we were; and besides the salutary influence it will have upon our credit and resources at home, it will produce the happy effect of demonstrating to the enemy, that, whatever the nature of the contest may be, or whatever its duration, our strength is undiminished, our resources unexhausted, and our general situation unimpaired; that the hopes they entertain of destroying the country through the medium of its finance, are as vain as their designs are wicked; and that, whatever measures they may think proper to adopt against this country, they will find us not at all disabled for the contest. But, Sir, it is necessary for me to be more explicit; and I will endeavour to make the point appear as clear to the house as it now appears to me.

If I must borrow twelve millions, four of those may be borrowed without making any additional debt; for the sinking-fund will pay so much. There then will remain eight millions, which would be an additional permanent capital if suffered to be funded: for these eight millions, therefore, I would make a different provision, that is to say, I would propose that the increased assessed taxes, the plan of which I have already laid before the house, be continued till the principal and interest be completely discharged; so that, after seven millions have been raised for this year, the same taxes in one year more, with the additional aid of the sinking fund, will pay off all that principal and intermediate interest. My proposition, therefore, if carried into effect, would not only furnish a current supply, but quicken the redemption of the national debt, without bearing harder on

the people than they can conveniently sustain. This would speak a language to all Europe; this would speak a language to the enemy, that, by cooling the ardour of their expectations, and shewing them the absurdity of their designs, will afford the best chance of shortening the duration of the war, and of lessening the duration and weight of our taxes. If you feel yourselves equal to this exertion, its effects will not be confined merely to the benefits I have stated in the way of general policy, and in a successful determination of the contest, but will go farther; it will go to the exoneration of the nation from increased burdens, and to the relief of those who are to follow us from the weight of the expenses of a war, waged in defence of a system which we have received from our progenitors in trust to be transmitted entire to our successors. Unless you feel you have a right to expect, that by less exertion you will be equally secure, and indulge the supposition that, by stopping short of this effort, you will produce a successful termination of the war, you must set aside all apprehensions of the present pressure, and, by vigorous exertion, endeavour to secure your future stability, the happy effects of which, I pledge myself, will soon be seen and acknowledged. I am aware that it will be said, (for it has often been said) and I agree to it, that it would be fortunate if the practice of funding had never been introduced; and that it is not terminated is much to be lamented; but if we are arrived at a moment which requires a change of system, it is some encouragement for us to look forward to benefits, which, on all former occasions, have been unknown, because the means of obtaining them were neglected.

If, Sir, the whole sum be provided for in the manner I propose, instead of being funded, the advantages will be greater than those who have not been at the trouble to calculate it can suppose. In the mode I propose, the whole, with the interest on it, will amount to no more than sixteen millions; raise that sum, and you and your posterity are completely exonerated from it; but if, on the contrary, you will fund, it will entail an annual tribute of 150,000*l.* for forty years, which makes a

difference of not less than forty millions to those who are to follow you. These are the principles, this is the language, this the conduct fit for men legislating for a country, that, from its situation, its constitution, and its natural strength, bears the fairest title of any in Europe to perpetuity. You should look to distant benefits, and not work in the narrow circumscribed sphere of short-sighted, selfish politicians. You should put to yourselves this question, the only one now to be considered—"Shall we sacrifice, or shall we save to our posterity, a sum of between forty and fifty millions sterling?" And above all, you should consider the important effect such firm and dignified conduct will have in the progress and termination of the present contest, which may, without exaggeration, be said to involve every thing dear to yourselves, and to include in it the fate of your posterity.

The house will now judge how far I have succeeded in finding a criterion by which to mark out the distinctions and the proportions in the taxes I have proposed. They will decide how far I have succeeded in accommodating the different rates of increase to the circumstances of the different classes of society: they will determine whether I have given a plan that affords sufficient modifications, and just mitigations of the severity of the imposts. If there be any thing defective, I wish to supply it; if there be any thing erroneous, I am desirous to rectify it; if I have exceeded, I am willing to retrench: it is a measure of unprecedented importance, and it must be my anxious desire to be correct in it. I therefore court investigation—but I earnestly hope there will be no difference of opinion in the house, as to the principle upon which the measure is founded. As I have not been able to find, in any man of any party, a trace of doubt as to the sufficiency of our resources, I think I have a right to assume that there can be no difference as to our right to employ them; at least I can say that I have not heard a word of any avowed difference on that point in any corner of the country. Attested thus, I have produced a state of resources

unimpaired even by this wasteful war: on any other account no difference can possibly arise upon this day. In the interval between this and the day on which I shall finally bring this subject before you, I will receive with attention any observations that gentlemen may please to suggest; and I hope all will agree with me, that the question for consideration is not, whether the burdens proposed are heavy or unprecedented, but whether there is any option left to us—whether they are not dictated by unavoidable necessity, and whether any, better adapted to the circumstances of the country, can be devised to supply their places?

Sir, having said so much, I will not follow it up with particulars, but move a resolution conformable to the general design I have laid before the committee; and I will postpone the particular parts of the plan to another day—the earliest that circumstances will allow.

He then moved the following resolution, which was agreed to:

"That it is the opinion of this committee, that there shall be paid a duty, not exceeding treble the amount of the duties imposed by several acts of parliament now in force, on houses and windows and inhabited houses, by the 6th, 19th, 24th, and 27th Geo. III. and likewise the several additional duties of ten per cent. per annum, imposed thereon by several acts of parliament, with certain exceptions and abatements."

Mr. Tierney rose next; and, after going over the various calculations of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and inferring from thence the declining state of the national resources, he declared, that, with the present administration, he held it impossible that this country could have peace. The right honourable gentleman, he affirmed, wanted the requisites to bring about a peace; he possessed not the confidence and respect either of France, or of any of the European powers.

Mr. Pitt replied:

I shall endeavour to follow the honourable gentleman who has just sat down, in some of the observations he has thought proper to make. Knowing, as I do, the ingenuity of that gentleman, and recollecting his declaration in this house some time since; knowing that he stands pledged to give his Majesty's present ministers every opposition in his power—when I compare that declaration, and apply it to his speech to-night, a speech certainly not destitute of ingenuity or of preparation, I own I am a little at a loss to find in him that consistency for which he expects to obtain credit, as a man wishing for nothing so much as the welfare of his country. Whatever may be thought of the speech of the honourable gentleman, either by the public or by his own constituents, I shall observe upon parts of his speech as they appear to me. I will endeavour to follow him in his direct and his collateral topics; in some which were certainly not direct, and in others that I cannot say were collateral, because they had no reference to the subjects now before the committee, either collaterally or otherwise. He begins by complaining of excess, and he comments on the navy estimates, in which his zeal has misled him. He talks of three millions, and a million and a half, as sums I took credit for; whereas I stated the whole sum to which he referred in this part of his speech would be three millions, and that I should provide for half of them by bills, and that a million and a half of them should be outstanding. But he then goes on to state, that I made a mistake of three millions upon the statement of navy extraordinaries. Gentlemen assert things that have no foundation any where but in their own fancy, and they repeat them so often, and with so much confidence, that at last they become the dupes of their own artifice, and believe these assertions themselves. Be it remembered, however, that in the course of every session since the war began, I have, on every occasion, stated that the nature of such extensive transactions, as those of the army and navy, was such as to render accuracy in the estimate unattainable. I do not pretend to it at any time, but I always do my utmost to

approach it, and I do aver that there never was at any time of war more attention paid, than in the whole course of this, to prevent excesses beyond the estimate. True it is, you have had more excesses in this than in any other war, nor is it marvellous, for it is a war of a different kind, and of a more complicated nature than any other you were ever before engaged in. But the honourable gentleman, in his public zeal to detect the fallacy of my statements, assures the committee, that, in stating the sum of five millions upon the article of the navy, I have committed an error of three millions. This he states as being the excess upon one article, which amounts, I own, to only five millions; but the excess fairly applies to the whole sum of seventeen millions, of which these five were a part; and instead of taking the whole and considering that excess as applying to the whole, he applies it to one part, merely because the whole of the sum was voted by separate votes on different heads, and compares that excess with one branch of the whole. I shall say no more than that I leave the committee to judge of the fairness of such a mode of reasoning.

The honourable gentleman says, I do not now speak with confidence on the produce of the taxes, and yet he allows the revenue to be flourishing, in which too, it seems, he rejoices. He says I have put into the mouth of the king what has not been uttered out of my own this night. Nothing has been said by me upon that subject to-night—I mean upon the flourishing state of our revenue. No, Sir, it is not out of my mouth that expression came to-night, and which the honourable gentleman censures me for omitting, but out of his own; and when the honourable gentleman thinks he sees a smile from this side of the house, he magnifies it into a horse-laugh in consequence of what he advances. I am afraid he gives credit to some part of the house for more attention than they deserve. All these considerations induce me to suspect, that, if I had stated many things which he expected me to state concerning the prosperity of the country, he was prepared with a long speech to contradict me

upon that head. He went into a detail of the revenue in 1796 and 1797, from which the committee is to derive nothing but a very desponding inference. For the future powers of this country are, according to his deductions, to be very feeble. He is not, however, bound to abide by these sentiments; and as he says he will take a view of the subject, and mature his judgment for the discussion of it in future, I hope a minute attention to it will alter his opinion. He has told us that the accounts are not yet before us. In this his vigilance has been eluded, for the documents necessary for the purpose are now upon your table, and by which, if he condescends to peruse them, he will find that the report of the committee of finance, and which holds out to us a prospect so flattering, is entirely justified. The honourable gentleman dwelt for some time on the produce of the wine duty, and that of the Scotch distillery, and infers that they will not answer the estimate; in which inference he is too rapid, for neither of which has hitherto found its level. These points I merely touch incidentally, not meaning to argue them now, that being foreign to the leading purpose of this night's discussion, and of which there is to be a detailed discussion hereafter.

The next point to which the honourable gentleman refers, is the subject of the advance from the bank to government. Upon this the honourable gentleman has indulged in a species of eloquence, which is almost as new to him, as is his congratulation on the prosperity of this country. He says that this resembles the system which was adopted in France, and leads to the despotism which, under the name of liberty, is carried on there. What similarity there is between the limited and voluntary advances of the bank, to an amount which would be shortly repaid, and the depreciated millions and milliards of the French government, I leave to him, and to those who are now convinced with him of the rapacity of that system, and who have so lately thought it prudent to declaim against the French system, to discover. He says that this is a dangerous connexion between the government and the bank; and he states the sum of three millions to be of an enormous amount

for the bank to advance to government. He had forgot, not to say he never knew, for to a gentleman of so much research, that would be an extravagant supposition; but he seems to have forgotten, that the advances of the bank to government have never been less during the present war, than they are now proposed to be, under the very special nature and extraordinary circumstances of the present war. I ask, then, what does the honourable gentleman mean, by saying that this is a dangerous connexion between government and the bank? Does he mean to say that the restriction on the bank ought no longer to continue? If he does not, I maintain that it is no dangerous connexion whatever, since it will be of no inconvenience to the public while the restriction continues, for the public security is precisely the same as if this advance was not made by the bank at all.

But it seems the honourable gentleman could not face his constituents; that they would ask him, where he was when such a measure was proposed? [Where my *tongue* was, said Mr. Tierney.] It is not very material, Sir, which, as I should suppose where the honourable gentleman is, there his tongue must be also. He says that the measure is of such an alarming nature, that the sense of the house ought to be taken upon it at once; he says that I have a great desire to impose upon the house, and that I distrust my case. I have heard, Sir, that great eagerness for the dispatch of business is sometimes evidence that the party bringing it forward has some distrust of it; but that I should propose a plan that would give him time to prepare a speech, is an instance of distrust, which, considering the extent of his ingenuity, I could hardly have expected to be accused of. I cannot help thinking, that it is a little extraordinary he should first tell me that the measure I propose is unprecedented, and then tell me I am to blame for offering to the house time to come to a decision upon it, instead of calling for a decision immediately.

The honourable gentleman then tells us that this is a plan which cannot be effectual in the hands of his Majesty's present ministers, for that they are not qualified to carry it into effect.

That there may be, and are, in his opinion, others better qualified, I have no doubt, and I have as little doubt that he would be ready to propose them if it depended upon him; but if his objections go against the man, it is hardly fair, upon that ground, to call upon the house to reject the measure. It seems I am not the person to make any proposals of this kind to the house. Why am I not the man? The question is, not who proposes the measure, but whether the measure ought to be adopted? But when the honourable gentleman comes to argue the question in that sense, and when he comes to lay before you the unexampled profusion of which he says I am the profligate author, I hope he will condescend to take in view the extent of the service for which we have had to provide, its extraordinary nature and character, as well as the great expense with which it has been attended, without forgetting the dearness of all the articles of provision, and various other things, at which it is not necessary at this moment to glance; but above all, at the extraordinary efforts, and corresponding expense.

But there is another part of the speech of the honourable gentleman, which contains an important objection to my continuing in the official situation in which I now stand, because, he says, while I remain in that situation, this country cannot have peace. If he thinks so, that is a good reason for his moving an address to remove me. Supposing this house to agree to that motion, there is no reason, I presume, why this house should not take care of the interests of the public, and still more why, supposing them to have no objection to the measure now before them, they should not agree to it. But there is a reason for apprehending that this country cannot have peace while I and my colleagues continue in office. Why cannot this country have peace while we continue in office? Because, in truth, we have not *the confidence of the enemy*. Sir, we cannot have the confidence of the enemy. The confidence of the enemy! No, Sir, that is impossible! We are not entering into the spirit of their rules, we are not disposed to promote their principles; we do not wish to imitate their system; we do not think it practical in England,

however it may be made the subject of applause by those who favour it in their hearts, and, for the purpose of opposing England's true interest, the occasional theme of vindictive declamation, while it is wished that their principles should be adopted: which principles have been admired, and occasionally extolled, since the commencement of the revolution, by those who have opposed us. If the only claim to the support of the honourable gentleman in the prosecution of the war is, to deserve the confidence of the enemy; if it is necessary to admire the French revolution, which has been the root of all the evils of the present contest; if it is necessary to have asserted the justice of the enemy's cause; if the exertions of the war are to be entrusted to those who have, from the commencement of the contest, thwarted its prosecution, then, indeed, I am glad that we have not the vote of the honourable gentleman in our favour.

But the honourable gentleman says again, that there is no confidence in us in any part of Europe, and he proves it by shewing that all our allies have deserted us, and kept none of their engagements. This argument, if true, might go a good way towards shewing that we ought to have no confidence in them; but until he shews some instances of our want of good faith, I apprehend it does not prove that they have no confidence in us, and proves pretty nearly as much, as the argument that it is necessary that I ought to possess the confidence of his Majesty's enemies in France.

I think I am entitled now, in my turn, since the honourable gentleman has opposed the whole system of the plan which I have proposed, and especially as he is so much, and as it were exclusively, the friend of his country, to ask him, whether he has a better, or any in its stead? for he has stated none. Perhaps he has not had time to digest a proper plan; if he has any in contemplation, he cannot fairly object to the proposal which I make now, since he is to have time to prepare his own, which I trust will be much better. But the honourable gentleman says, that if this plan should have been brought forward at all, it should have been brought forward much sooner. He acknowledges that

in cases of great danger, great efforts ought to be made. Now, I think that in our former situation we were not in so much danger as we are at present, if we do not make great resistance; and therefore it appears to me to be more sensible to make great efforts in time when they are necessary, than to make them when the circumstances of the time do not call for them, especially when by your financial operations, you are likely to bring the contest to a happy termination. But the honourable gentleman says, that this plan is to shew that we are at the end of our resources. If he thought so, he might have spared himself the trouble of pronouncing a panegyric upon these resources in the course of his speech this night. The honourable gentleman says, that this plan shews to the world that we are at the end of our funding system. The manner in which persons possessed of capital in different parts of the country have acted, in investing their property in your funds, is no proof that monied men think so; but proves, on the contrary, the confidence they have in your resources, and proves also, that wealth is generally diffused all over the country. This weath is manifested in the improvement of your agriculture, in your buildings, in your canals, in your inclosures; all these, I say, prove that you possess at this moment the confidence of monied men, that there is at this moment more wealth than there was at any former period in this country.

The resolution was agreed to, and a day was fixed for taking the several propositions of the Chancellor of the Exchequer into further consideration.

December 14, 1797.

On a motion for the second reading of the bill for increasing the assessed taxes, a long and animated discussion took place.

After Mr. Fox had delivered his sentiments in reprobation of the measure, Mr PITT rose:—

Before I proceed to make any remark upon the wide variety of topics which the honourable gentlemen upon the other side of the house have introduced, I shall just advert to the last point on which the right honourable gentleman * insisted. The other parts of his speech were directed against the whole of the measure in substance, but in the latter part he separately urged the propriety of delay. The right honourable gentleman founds this argument for delay upon the agitation which this question has excited in the public mind, and the objections to which the measure is liable in its application to a great number of his constituents. I am aware, that in all great towns, particularly in the metropolis, the objections will be felt with peculiar force; but at the same time I am sensible that in the provisions of which the bill is susceptible, many modifications may be expected, many are practicable consistently with the leading principle of the measure, and many are necessary in order, as far as possible, to prevent it from bearing hard in particular instances. I am aware even that greater modifications may be necessary than appeared to me requisite upon the first consideration of the subject, and when the first imperfect outline of it was presented. This, however, does not by any means tend to impeach the general principle of the measure. These objections are capable of modification without defeating the salutary object, which it is the purpose of the measure to secure. Instead of feeling these objections as completely destructive of the principle, every hour's reflection convinces me, that though it is our duty to inquire in what respects modification may be proper, how it may be practicable, how mitigation may be given so as to prevent any oppressive application of the measure, yet as to the general necessity of providing for the public safety, and repelling the danger by which we are threatened, on the determination we shall form upon this question after mature discussion depends

* Mr. Fox.

whether by the exertions we have pledged ourselves to make, we shall rescue the country from impending calamity, and lay the foundation of as great a portion of future greatness and prosperity as any nation ever enjoyed, or whether we shall surrender the dignity of the British nation, and expose to inevitable ruin the sources of its glory and its power. Feeling as the representatives of the people, that it is our duty to provide for these important and essential objects, we shall be deterred by no difficulties, we shall spare no pains, we shall sacrifice every local prejudice, every partial opinion, to a consciousness of the necessity in which we are placed, to make a vigorous exertion. Feeling as I do that necessity, I know my duty too well not to persist in what I conceive to be a measure calculated to save the country from the present danger, and to enable it to struggle against future attacks. It is our first duty, as guardians, to provide for its present safety, and to transmit to posterity the blessings which we have enjoyed, and the means of preserving them. It is by these considerations that our conduct ought to be directed; it is by these great maxims of policy that the measure ought to be judged.

Can we then conceive it our duty, on account of some particular objections of some alleged hardship of application, to hang up the bill altogether before its provisions have been discussed, before its details have been arranged? Must we forego the opportunity of suggesting the case where the evil would be felt, of removing prejudice where it exists, and obviating objections where they are well founded? Instead of agreeing to any delay, both in real respect to those who complain of the hardship with which the bill in its present shape would attach, and in duty to the public, for whose service in this important crisis we are called upon to provide, we ought to lose no time to examine the bill with the utmost attention, and see where the pressure which it would occasion may be mitigated. What are the particulars and extent of the farther modifications which it may still be necessary to introduce, it will not be incumbent upon me now to state. It will be recollected that, when I first opened the subject,

I stated that, as a visible criterion of income, I preferred the payment of the assessed taxes, because it was more comprehensive, better calculated to diffuse the burden, and more susceptible of modification in the various classes where it would be required, than any other criterion which could be taken. It will be recollected, not by the honourable gentleman*, who had thought it proper to absent himself from his attendance in parliament, but it will be recollected by the house, that one great recommendation of this criterion I stated to be, that the principle being still preserved, it furnished greater means of modification, more opportunity for providing for the particular cases of hardships and inconvenience, than any other criterion which could be adopted. The means of this modification are now in our power, and we shall but perform our duty to our constituents, by shewing our readiness to consider the inconvenience, and to apply the remedy. That many modifications are necessary I am aware, and in the committee, both those which I may propose, and which others may suggest, will be considered. This I trust will be a sufficient answer to what fell from a worthy alderman † at the beginning of the debate. Much as I differ from that honourable gentleman as to the extent of the abatement, and the nature of the scale of contribution he proposed, I was glad to hear the manly and decided manner in which he enforced the necessity of great exertion, and the propriety of raising a considerable sum, without recurring to the system of funding. I am convinced that the sentiments he expressed were congenial to the feelings of a great majority of his constituents and of the country; and I could not help remarking the contrast between the language he held, and the tone of the honourable gentleman ‡ on the other side, compared with the sentiments of their respective constituents, in the indiscriminate opposition to every part of the plan, which characterised the speeches of both the honourable gentlemen.

Having made these observations on the question of delay, I

* Mr. Fox. † Alderman Lushington. ‡ Mr. Fox.

shall proceed shortly to consider some of the other topics on which the honourable gentlemen insisted. I do not complain of the wide field of argument which they took up; I know that in a parliamentary sense they were regular: whether they were justifiable in the use they made of this privilege, and whether they made a proper choice of the topics which they introduced on the present subject, I shall leave for the house to determine. The object of this bill shortly is, an extraordinary grant of money for the support of the war; it proposes to raise within the year a certain part of the supplies, by a tax on income, on the visible criterion of the assessed taxes, subject to modification as circumstances may require. In considering the whole of the case, then, the first question that occurs is, whether it is proper to grant any money at all? Then, whether the principle of raising a certain part within the year ought to be admitted? And, thirdly, whether by this criterion attaching to income in the course of expenditure, the burden would in general be fairly apportioned?

As to the first point, whether any money at all ought to be granted, the honourable gentleman *, though he did not say so in very words, by the whole of his argument supposed the negative. The right honourable gentleman who spoke last distinctly argued, that while ministers continued in power, he could not agree to any supplies being granted. In stating this to have been their meaning, I am endeavouring to do justice to their mode of reasoning. Unless upon this idea, more than three-fourths of their observations were irrelevant to the subject now before the house. If they do not contend that peace cannot be obtained by the present ministers, that they ought to be dismissed before any scheme of supply can at all be a fit subject for discussion, the greater part of their argument is quite foreign to the matter now under consideration.

The right honourable gentleman, while he argues that my honourable friend † considered the majority of the house and his

* Mr. Sheridan. † Mr. Dundas.

Majesty's ministers as the same, forgets that his honourable friend *, when he talked of our going out of our places, did not address himself to the house, but gave it, as a very friendly advice no doubt, personally to us. It was expressed with a hope that we would of ourselves abandon the offices we held, as the means of obtaining peace. The honourable gentleman then must settle this inconsistency with his honourable friend beside him. But before the honourable gentleman, with all his talents, can demonstrate the propriety of our dismissal, he ought to shew that the nine persons, whom he proposes to pick up between London and Windsor, will administer the public affairs better than those by whom they are now administered; he must bring forward something more conclusive and more convincing than any thing he had to offer when the dismissal of ministers was last discussed, the failure of which attempt had induced him to quit the service of his constituents, and his despair of success had led him to abdicate his public character. If I understand him right, he considers as preliminary to every measure of public defence, to every exertion in support of the war, a radical change is necessary. What the right honourable gentleman means by this preliminary, expressed in a manner so large and comprehensive, in terms no less obscure than undefined; whether a parliamentary reform is to be only a part of this sweeping change; how this change of system is to operate as a means of saving the country; how this unlimited change is to conduce to the public safety in preparing exertion and in repelling danger, I am really at a loss to conceive. In considering the propriety of such a change of system, or such a preliminary as the introduction of new men into office, it certainly will be important for the house to ascertain, whether such a change of ministers is calculated to secure us against the dangers with which we are threatened, whether it is calculated to check the ambition of the enemy, and to procure a peace that will satisfy the honour of the nation, and preserve the sources of the public wealth and prosperity.

* Mr. Sheridan.

But the honourable gentleman says, that the whole tenor of our language at the beginning of the present contest was, that no peace could be made with the jacobin republic, and that France is thus justified in refusing to make peace with the present administration. At no period of the war did we ever express such a sentiment, or even entertain the idea that no peace could be made with republican France. I remember the quotation from Virgil to which he has alluded, and as far as I can recollect it was used in one of those debates in which the right honourable gentleman proposed that overtures should be made for peace at a period when we contended that no security for peace could be obtained, and that the evils of war were not to be compared to the inadequate peace which then could have been concluded. The right honourable gentleman then urged the question, whether no extremity of danger could induce us to make such overtures? I then answered, that this must ever be a question of comparison, that we must decide as circumstances might arise, and at least we ought to persevere till our means were exhausted, till we could support the contest no longer, and we could say,

Toto certatum est corpore regni.

The honourable gentleman says, that the meaning of Virgil cannot be explained away, but he seemed to think that Virgil's language might be improved. The honourable gentleman urged the propriety of making overtures even at that period, and contended, as he often had done, that if reasonable terms of peace were refused, it would unite England and divide France. He then retorted, that after such overtures were rejected,

Toto certandum est corpore regni.

The honourable gentleman has now seen these overtures made and rejected; and now, when he wishes to bind me down to the meaning of Virgil, I think he ought not to forget his Latin pledge.

If the honourable gentleman has seen that all attempts at negociation have been unavailable, if he can look to any period in which he is called upon to fulfil his pledge, if he means to animate the public exertions, to exhort to perseverance, to stimulate their zeal for the maintenance of the national honour and the national safety, at a moment when these objects are thus unequivocally stated, he would not, as he now does, attempt to disarm their courage, and to distract their efforts. What did the honourable gentleman expect from the overtures he proposed? What degree of insult and contumely did he lay his account to endure before he was to be roused to energy and to honour? Did he expect any thing more insulting than the reception our overtures had obtained, any thing more repulsive, more haughty, more injurious, than the proceedings of the enemy; any thing more decisive of their determined spirit of hostility than their refusal to discuss the terms we proposed, or to propose any terms in their turn, on which they were willing to conclude a peace? If any thing can meet the honourable gentleman's ideas of insult, sufficiently humiliating to require him to act upon his pledge, let him look to the negociation at Lisle, and the conduct of the enemy upon that occasion. The honourable gentleman, though he admitted formerly that there might be occasions to demand unanimity and exertion, thinks himself freed from his pledge, because ministers were never sincere in their exertions for peace, and France was justified in refusing to treat with them. But when did the honourable gentleman discover this? When did the light flash upon his mind, that ministers originally were hostile to the republican government of France, and therefore could not be sincere? It is somewhat surprising that this never occurred to the honourable gentleman before the pledge was given, instead of discovering it as our apology for eluding the pledge after it was given. If the dislike of ministers to French principles proves their aggression, and justifies the hostility of the enemy, this cannot be a new discovery; it certainly would as well have justified the honourable gentleman in distrusting any efforts they might make, even while they urged

the overtures, on the refusal of which they promised unanimity, as now when they have seen their overtures made without effect. The declaration of France, at the beginning of the contest, proved that on their side it was a war of aggression, and on our's a war of necessity and good faith towards our allies. If ministers did at first see the danger of French principles, without embarking in the contest, must they have been the aggressors when they saw their fears realized in the actual aggression, in which the principles they had apprehended finally terminated? At no period of the contest did we say there could be no peace with republican France. We said, that for peace we would not agree to prostrate the nation at the feet of the enemy; that we could not agree to give up what was essential to the safety of the country. If the honourable gentleman can prove that we have applied for peace, disowning the justice of our cause, abandoning the principles on which the present safety and future prosperity of the country are founded, he would prove that we considered the period arrived when every exertion had been made, and when the struggle was to be given up, because it could no longer be supported. The honourable gentleman, however, does not say that we have acted in this manner. What then are the opinions of those who have uniformly, or rather with growing zeal and devotion, contended that the war was just on the part of France, and unjust upon the side of this country? Have they not repeatedly said, on former occasions, that our ordinary resources were exhausted? And to-day, with mysterious silence, they pass over the subject, and cautiously decline giving any opinion on the efficacy of former resources, while they reprobate new expedients; and say nothing about the propriety of resorting to the funding system, while they condemn the principle of every plan by which it may be relieved.

The honourable gentlemen have said, that our ordinary sources are exhausted, and that no extraordinary resources can be employed. I leave it to the house then to judge how far those, who in principle give the enemy a right to ask all, who, by decrying our resources, give them confidence to advance every pretension,

by kindly informing them, that from our inability to resist, they may extort whatever they demand, are the true friends to their country, or the enlightened advocates of peace? I am convinced that the majority of the house and of the country will feel that peace is not likely to be obtained upon terms consistent with our honour or our safety, by dismissing ministers, if they are to be followed by men who have ever viewed with kindness the principles of the enemy;—by men who have justified every act of the enemy, while they have traduced every measure of the British government;—by men who have extolled the resources of the French, with a zeal equalled only by the perseverance with which they have depreciated the energy and the resources of their own country. Whatever opinions such men profess to have of the sincerity of ministers, of their capacity for the conduct of affairs: whatever conclusions they may draw from the review of the finances and the magnitude of our expenses, I leave it to the country and to the world to determine, whether, under such auspices, there could be any chance of peace upon terms short of the basest humiliation to an insolent foe, and the most criminal surrender of every principle of national honour, and every source of national greatness.

The honourable gentleman speaks of peace as absolutely necessary: but has the honourable gentleman explained how peace is to be obtained? After encouraging the perseverance of the enemy in their wild and destructive design, by holding out how little resistance we can oppose to their attempts, the honourable gentleman says not a word of this. He thinks he does his duty to his country and his constituents, by enforcing the necessity of peace, without saying a syllable of the means of pacification. Because he thinks peace cannot be obtained without a change of system, he would in the mean time suspend all grants of supply. After disavowing every opinion we have pronounced, after recanting every principle we have maintained, after abandoning every pledge we have given, after neglecting every means of defence, and renouncing every manly exertion, how would the honourable gentleman have us appease the fury of the enemy,

and secure the safety of England? Why there must be a total change of system in England and Ireland! Till Ireland was in a better situation France could have no inducement to make peace! What this change, so mysteriously announced, is to be in detail, we are left to guess. Are you to neglect the means of defence, if you cannot persuade the enemy to make peace. The change which the honourable gentleman recommends, I suspect would be to remove those distinctions, and to sweep away those privileges which have raised the hatred and envy of France. But the honourable gentleman contends that the French would be justified in refusing to make peace, because Ireland is not unanimous; would he, however, consider ministers justified in refusing to make peace, because La Vendee was in a state of insurrection? If in his eyes this would be an insufficient reason for refusing to make peace with France, when nearly one-fourth of its inhabitants were in a state of open hostility against the tyranny under which they were oppressed, will he say that it is a reason for the persevering hostility of the enemy, that Ireland is in a state of danger, arising from the necessary exertion of vigour to resist the operation of French principles diffused every where with such assiduity, and in Ireland with peculiar success;—circulated with that industry, which they have ever shewn, to supplant by their desolating principles of liberty the real practical blessings of the British constitution?

Mr. Pitt declared, he could not conceive how that degree of perfect unanimity, which the right honourable gentleman seemed to think so necessary, could be obtained while these principles were disseminated with such industry; but this was not the time to enter into this discussion, and he had only alluded to this subject, to shew the consistency of the right honourable gentleman's argument, when applied to the case of La Vendee. But after all, did the right honourable gentleman seriously imagine, that he had convinced the house that it was unnecessary for them to make great efforts? He had relied much upon the declarations which had been made out of doors respecting this

tax: as far as the public opinion accorded with the right honourable gentleman's views, so far as he seemed inclined to treat it with respect; but he totally laid out of his consideration those sentiments which accompanied those declarations. Though, in some instances, the people had expressed their disapprobation of this tax, in its present state, without any of the alterations and modifications which it would be necessary to make, yet they never went the length of the right honourable gentleman, and said, that no supplies ought at all to be raised; on the contrary, in the case of the borough of Southwark, they had expressed the strongest sense of the necessity of making great and vigorous exertions for the public defence. Could this be a subject of doubt, after all the papers relative to the rupture of the negociation had been laid before the house, and above all, since they had seen the late proclamation of the Directory? Indeed, he should feel ashamed if it could now become matter of argument.

If then it might be assumed, as an indisputable proposition, that great and vigorous exertions were necessary at the present arduous crisis, the next point for consideration was, whether a large part of the supplies of the year ought to be raised by the mode now proposed, within the year; or whether the whole should be raised by the old system of funding? This was the real question for consideration: but, instead of discussing it, the gentlemen on the other side had exerted all their abilities to prove that we ought to make no efforts at all. They had never given any answer to the only important question, viz. if great exertions were necessary, how were they to be made? Instead of this, they had only said, that a proposal to depart from the funding system came with a very bad grace from him, who had funded so much. This could not be considered as a very strong argument; and he should have thought, that the gentlemen, after so long an absence from their parliamentary duty, would have discovered some more efficacious mode of reasoning, than to say, "Do not adopt a good measure, because you ought to have adopted it sooner." Surely the house had a right to expect, from a grave and experienced statesman, some-

thing more than a declaration, that if any means could be devised to raise a large proportion of the supplies within the year and if these means were in their nature unobjectionable, he should not oppose them. This could not be considered as a very great instance of condescension. However, the principal objection of the right honourable gentleman seemed to be, that those extraordinary means ought not to be resorted to now, when a great and obvious necessity existed, because we had not employed them when no such necessity did exist.

But gentlemen seemed to consider, that, by adopting the present mode of raising a part of the supply, the system of funding was to be given up, and the present substituted in its room. If gentlemen had been present in their places when this measure was first proposed, they would have known that the funding system was not given up; on the contrary, he had proposed that the larger part of the supplies of the year should be raised by way of loan. It was thought advisable, as the funds had been so much increased, to ease them, by procuring a large part of the supplies in a different mode; therefore, so far from giving up the system of funding, the present plan was intended to relieve it. That this object, if it could be attained, would be most desirable, could not be questioned, even by those who disliked the present tax.

Having said thus much, he did not think it necessary to argue this point more at length upon the present occasion. The point that called particularly for the consideration of the house was this—assuming that it was necessary to raise a large sum within the year, was the present plan, the most expedient, and the most likely to be effectual? In considering this subject, the two honourable gentlemen on the other side had argued very differently. The first called it a tax upon property; the other, a general tax upon income. The latter was nearer the truth, but neither of them was correct. With respect to the honourable gentleman who called this a tax upon property, it was astonishing that he should be so ill informed of what passed in that house, even though he was absent, as to state as arguments

against this plan, the very topics which he (Mr. Pitt) had urged in order to obviate some objections which had been made to it. The honourable gentleman had contended, that a tax upon property, supposing it possible that the amount of the property could be ascertained, would not be a proper measure. In this opinion, however, the honourable gentleman differed from those declarations out of doors against this tax, upon which so much reliance had been placed on the other side of the house. However, the honourable gentleman had pushed this argument to a greater length than he had done. He (Mr. Pitt) had said, that if the amount of every man's property could be ascertained, it would be a most desirable thing to make the people contribute to the public exigence in proportion to their wealth. But there existed no means of ascertaining the property of individuals, except such as were of a nature that could not be resorted to. Instead, therefore, of a tax upon property, this was what he had stated it to be, a tax upon general expenditure. In opening it to the house, he had anticipated an objection which he thought would be made, viz. that this tax applied only to such income as was in expenditure. This was an inconvenience which it was impossible to avoid, without having recourse to such a scrutiny of property as must, in every point of view, be highly objectionable. That the present plan was in its nature imperfect he was ready to admit, and had stated it to be so when he first introduced the subject; but he thought it the best and most general criterion that could be found. The question then was, whether this plan was so very imperfect, and so objectionable in principle, that it ought immediately to be rejected; or whether, after proper alteration and modification, it might not be of the greatest public benefit? The right honourable gentleman opposite to him had not considered this with his usual accuracy; for, because this tax was calculated at seven millions, and that it was not to exceed a tenth part of a person's income, he had calculated the whole income of the country at only seventy millions; but the inaccuracy of this calculation must be obvious to the right honourable gentleman, when he recollected, that though

this tax never took more than one-tenth of the income, yet, in many cases it took only the 120th part, and in some cases took nothing. At all events, this observation was inapplicable, because he had never spoken of the general income of the country, but only so much of it as was in expenditure. Without dilating more upon this part of the subject, he should say a few words upon what he considered as the leading objections to the measure.

The right honourable gentleman had made a division of the different kinds of property, which appeared to him to be incorrect, inasmuch as it omitted one great source of income. The right honourable gentleman's division was, income arising from landed estates, from commercial pursuits, and from property in the funds. As to the income derived from professional exertions, the right honourable gentleman had very properly classed it under the head of commercial gains. But he had omitted one great source of income, viz. that which was received as the reward of labour; and of the latter class many were exempted by the criterion now proposed. The right honourable gentleman had contended, that this would operate as a tax upon funded property, which always had been, and must ever be, considered as inviolate. But the measure now proposed by no means tended to affect property in the funds. No description of income, whether arising from landed estates, commercial pursuits, or funded property, was meant to be exempted from the operation, because it was meant to attach upon expenditure in general. Where was the injustice of this? "Why," says the right honourable gentleman, "by taxing the expenditure of a man whose income is derived from the funds, you do in fact tax his property in the funds." If this was a valid objection, it ought not only to induce the house to reject this measure, but to repeal every tax that ever was laid on; because it was impossible to suggest a tax which would not be paid by people having money in the funds. Every tax imposed upon consumption, of course must be defrayed by people having property in the funds; but it was absurd to say that was a tax upon the funds. If this objection was

never made to taxes which were in their nature perpetual, it appeared to him singular that it should now, for the first time, be made to a tax which was merely temporary.

The next objection of the right honourable gentleman was, that a tax upon commercial income was not just; for, said he, a man's landed property is his own, but the income he derives from commerce is partly derived from his industry. This was not a time to enter into a minute discussion of these arguments, but surely the right honourable gentleman did not mean to contend that commercial gains were not a fair object of taxation. Those gains were derived under the protection of the laws of the country, and consequently ought to contribute proportionably to support them. He did not, however, mean to contend that many distinctions ought not to be made, and in the committee modifications would undoubtedly be proposed. As to persons who employed great capitals, in proportion to their annual gains, they would be less affected than persons of landed property; but all that could be inferred from this was, that it was a recommendation of the criterion. Perhaps this criterion, as far as it affected the lower classes, did not make distinctions enough. It would be recollected, that the particular reason he assigned for making this tax lower upon houses than upon the other articles was, that it should not fall too heavily upon that species of income arising from retail trade. The right honourable gentleman had next censured the mode of appeal given in this case. Some alterations might also be made upon this subject; but still he thought that mode of correcting the operation of the tax might be useful. The right honourable gentleman himself had admitted, that it might with propriety be applied to landed property; and, on the other hand, he (Mr. Pitt) was willing to admit, that as far as it related to the lower class of retail dealers, some modification was necessary. These were the general objections which had been made to the plan, and he should now leave them to the consideration of the house, with the observations he had made upon them.

He was aware that there were many who thought that, rather than take this visible criterion of ascertaining property, it would

be better to lay a general tax upon property. Undoubtedly, it they could find the means of taxing property equally, without compelling improper disclosure, it would be a most desirable object; but as that could not be done without being open to stronger objections than the present plan, it became necessary that some visible criterion should be found. If that were the case, could any criterion be found more general in its nature than the assessed taxes? The persons immediately affected by this tax amounted to 800,000, and through them extended to about 4,000,000 of persons. By this plan a great number of poor persons would be wholly excluded, and above half of the number before-mentioned would contribute very little.

The committee upon this bill might, and he had no doubt would, make many amendments in favour of shop-keepers; but all this would be consistent with the principle of the bill. The committee might, if they thought proper, make an alteration in the scale proposed, without any dereliction of the principle of the bill. Many mitigations were, undoubtedly necessary; but if the utmost inference that could be drawn from this was, that the exemptions should be carried farther than was proposed in the committee of ways and means, how did that affect the general principle of the measure, when they had the means of obviating in the committee the only objections that had been made against it? Without going now into those details, which he wished to reserve for a future period, he should only say, that if it was admitted that great exertions ought to be made, and that a large part of the supplies ought to be raised within the year, and if the only objection to this criterion was, that it would bear hard upon the lower orders of retail dealers, and it appeared to be within their power to obviate this objection; then, upon what ground could they hesitate, unless they had changed their opinions; unless, instead of making preparations for war, they were determined to begin by begging for peace from a haughty and insulting enemy? If they were not determined to give up every means of exertion, had they any option but to go into a committee upon this bill, to remedy the inconveniencies that might result from its

if passed in its present shape? What was the conduct which the gentlemen on the other side wished the house to adopt? It was to reject this measure at once, and thereby to declare that they would make no efforts to raise the supplies within the year. If the house adopted this advice, it would be proclaiming to France and to the world, their repentance for having dared to stand up in defence of their laws, their religion, and of every thing that was valuable to them as Englishmen. It would be humbling themselves before a haughty adversary; and, when they had no means of defence, imploring mercy and forgiveness from an enemy from whom we had to expect neither.

Upon these grounds, he hoped the house would read the bill a second time, and let it go into a committee.

The motion was agreed to,

Ayes 175
Noes 50

and the bill was ordered to be committed.

January 4, 1798.

ON a motion for the third reading of the bill for increasing the Assessed Taxes,

MR. PITT, at the close of the debate, (which had been adjourned from the preceding day) rose and expressed himself as follows:—

After the great length of time that has been consumed in the debate, the house, I am sure, will not be surprised if I should desire to avoid, as much as possible, the vast mass of extraneous matter that has been brought forward on the present occasion, and select from the numerous topics that present themselves to my view, such as bear directly on the subject under our immediate consideration. With this view I shall endeavour to guide the attention of the house through the various irrelevant and contradictory arguments that have been used, and fix it more exclusively on those leading and practical points, which alone can determine the question we are now called upon to decide. I

should have thought it, Sir, unnecessary to enter at any length into this argument, after the admission made by the several gentlemen who most vehemently opposed this measure, if I did not find that the principle they conceded in name is afterwards recalled in substance, and treated as a matter foreign to their consideration, and wholly inapplicable to the case now before them. The principle I allude to is this, whether, in the present circumstances of this country, there is, or is not an occasion to make a great and unexampled exertion to defeat the projects of the enemy, and secure our own national independence and honour. The affirmative of this proposition has been uniformly admitted and openly avowed: unless, therefore, the house, influenced by what has been advanced in the course of this night's debate, should think proper expressly to retract that opinion, I have a right to take it as the fundamental point that will govern their determination. This is not an opinion hastily adopted, and lightly considered. It is the language which, after full deliberation and inquiry, the house, at the commencement of the session, presented at the foot of the throne. Such, at that time, was their opinion, and the facts on which it was founded have, in the interval which has elapsed, been neither weakened nor denied. So far from any thing having been advanced contrary to this position, in the course of this debate, the right honourable gentleman himself * has unequivocally admitted, that great military and financial exertion is indispensable in the present situation of the country.

Now having advanced so much, it was natural to expect he would disclose the nature of those exertions, the necessity of which he did not deny; and if he disapproved of the present mode of raising so considerable a part of the supplies within the year that he would point out how that end might be obtained, by means less objectionable. The question, as now argued by the right honourable gentleman, is, whether, after a delay of six weeks since the first agitation of this subject, and two months since the issue of the negociation, from which period the necessity of the

* Mr. Fox.

exertions he admits must be dated;—whether, after such a delay, all exertion should not be suspended on the part of the country, till the house should obtain the dismission of his Majesty's present ministers, a radical parliamentary reform, and a total change of system. Such is the ground, if I followed the right honourable gentleman, and understood him right, on which he wishes the present question to be determined. In his opinion the guilt of the present administration is so enormous, their general and particular misconduct so manifest and great, that all the faculties of government should be suspended till they are removed. Their removal alone, however, will not do, and he has no hopes of security without a radical reform in parliament, and a total change of system; and, unless these latter parts are conceded, he professes that he will not take any share in any new administration that may be formed. With a view of persuading the house to pursue these objects, much time and much eloquence have been consumed, to convince them that they had a regular constitutional right to withhold the supplies, till the grievances, of which they might think proper to complain, were redressed. But time and eloquence appear to me to be wholly misemployed. No one that I know of ever doubted of the validity of that doctrine. The true question now is, according to the right honourable gentleman's mode of reasoning, not whether they have a right under the constitution of withholding supplies till grievances were redressed, but whether the house and country look upon those things as grievances which the right honourable gentleman does; and whether they will make such an exercise of power in the present situation of the country, to obtain a radical parliamentary reform and total change of system, according to his acceptation of those expressions? It becomes, therefore, of great consequence to ascertain what that acceptation is: and if any ambiguity or uncertainty exists from loose and indefinite expressions, the true meaning will be found to arise no less from the colour and complexion of circumstances which accompany, precede, and follow his professions, than logical distinctions and the context of words. Now I wish to put it seriously to the

house, whether, notwithstanding the explanations for the first ime given this night by the right honourable gentleman of the extent of his meaning in this respect, a very considerable portion of uncertainty, as to their extent, does not yet remain, and whether all the exertion he himself admits as necessary for the salvation of the country, is to be suspended till objects so general, loose, and indefinite, are obtained? for such is the partial result of all he has now advanced.

But to descend to the few particulars he has mentioned.—A change of ministers, he says, is absolutely necessary before any peace, consistent with the welfare and security of the country, can be expected. Yet how was this attempted to be proved. I do not consider myself much indebted to the right honourable gentleman's candour in admitting, that at least ministers were sincere in the last negociation for peace. No men, in or out of the house could venture to entertain a doubt of a fact so plain and manifest. The internal evidences of the treaty itself, and every circumstance by which it was attended, sets every suspicion on that subject at defiance. The purity and zeal of ministers throughout the whole of their conduct on that occasion, is established beyond the possibility of doubt. It is not now for me to enter into the discussion how far in 1794 and 1795, France was capable of preserving the relations of peace and amity. Every thing that the right honourable gentleman could urge on this subject, was advanced when the facts of that question were recent, and regularly before the house, which, after full inquiry and deliberation, gave an opinion contrary to that which he maintained. Every step that ministers have taken, relative to peace, has been submitted to parliamentary discussion, and is fully before the public: and I can assert with confidence, that no man can reflect upon their conduct in that respect, or deny that they have done every thing to obtain peace, short of sacrificing the honour and welfare of the country. According to the right honourable gentleman's own view of the subject, it is a singular mode of reasoning, to threaten ministers with dismission, that peace might be obtained, because they had not done

every thing in their power to obtain it before, though there is no doubt they have since been, and were still disposed so to do. The reasoning is still more curious if followed further. Suppose the measure recommended by the right honourable gentleman were adopted, it is likely that any new administration could succeed in negociation with the enemy, after a considerable suspension of exertion and comparative weakness, when the present administration, backed with the whole strength of the country, and having done every thing consistent with their duty to oppose the wrath of the enemy, had failed? Who will undertake that, in case of an appointment of a new administration, by means at least injurious to our strength, the enemy will be inclined to give terms of peace which they denied to the present ministers, when their conduct was admitted by all to be such, as this new administration could alone adopt? What ground of probability is there to expect such an event? But if the right honourable gentleman's argument has any weight, it is at best ill-timed at present, and should have been argued two months ago, on the first termination of the treaty.

The right honourable gentleman has attempted to draw a distinction between the responsibility of those in office, and those who are not so. In this, however, I do not see any marks of that impartiality which should equally guide both the one and the other. He seems to think, that, while he has a perfect right to arraign the conduct of public men in office, he being a private member of parliament, is not answerable to any account. I certainly know of no sanction that any man in office has, that should exempt him from animadversion on his conduct; and as little am I acquainted with any exemption that private gentlemen may have from reprehension, when their conduct is such as to deserve it: justice, prudence, and expediency, as little exempt the one as the other. I therefore cannot but behold the right honourable gentleman as amenable in his conduct as any other person, whether I consider his character, in relation to domestic concerns at home, or the situation of the enemy abroad. With specious professions of humility, he has doubtless declared himself

a simple individual, and expressed a determination to abstain from the risk and fatigue of public office. But what does this amount to? It is not certain that, thinking as many around him do, the country can be saved by him alone. Thinking so, I say, if a change of administration should take place, will they not feel themselves bound to overcome his scruples, and insist, as a matter of public duty, that he should take upon him the burden of office? Nay, I put it to them, whether they would not consider it as the pride and glory of their lives, by any means in their power, to place him in the situation to which they think his talents entitle him? And if they think so, they will, in so doing do no more than what, according to their view of the subject, is right and highly laudable in them to effect. Nevertheless those who might differ from them in that opinion, and, though admitting the brilliancy and extent of the right honourable gentleman's talents, think that the practical application of them is not conducive to the welfare of the country—such persons must be allowed to look to that event with repugnance and alarm. Upon this subject I have no hesitation of declaring, that were I obliged to plead guilty to every other charge against my colleagues and myself, or from any motive should wish to relinquish my present station, yet, while I wish such a peace as is consistent with the security and welfare of this kingdom, I should feel it as a bounden and over-ruling duty, if the right honourable gentleman had any chance of succeeding me, to remain in office at any risk, and with every sacrifice, in order to prevent an effect so fatal and ruinous to the safety and consequence of this country, as the gratification of the wishes of him and his friends. I have yet to learn what is the nature of that confidence, which the enemy are to have in an administration supported by that right honourable gentleman. I have on a former occasion said, that I do not envy those whose boast it is that they stand high in the confidence of the enemy. It is maintained, that in case of a change of administration, the house and the country would have the most unlimited confidence as to the sincerity of the negociation for peace, and if it could not be obtained on terms adequate to a just and

reasonable expectation, that in such a case the war would be continued with incalculable advantage. Will those who think in this way, attempt to deny that the right honourable gentleman and all his friends have uniformly, since the commencement of the war, maintained the cause of the enemy, at least so far as to contend that they acted on the defensive, and retained a right of inflicting vengeance, and that we were the aggressors? Throughout the whole course of the war they have asserted the justice of the enemy's cause and the insufficiency of our resources. How, in case of such men succeeding to offices, terms favourable or just to this country are to be expected, or how, if the war is to be continued, the enemy are to be convinced of the energy of our kingdom and the permanency of our means, I leave, with no doubt of its decision, to the prudence of the house.

The next point of attack against his Majesty's ministers is their general misconduct in respect to general constitutional doctrines; and then, that they are bad financial ministers, and incompetent to preserve the combination, which, as to the prosecution of the war, they had so much relied upon. These points, I must observe, which are wholly irrelevant to the present question, have repeatedly been discussed and decided in this house, and may be decided again after this is determined, as they have been before. These I do not in the least consider myself bound to enter into at present, and if I did, the decision, either one way or the other, would not affect this bill. Upon these subjects, however, it is obvious that the strength of the right honourable gentleman's arguments lay in this: he says, you, the administration of the country, are incompetent and ignorant; you rely on foreign alliances; these alliances desert you. You grant subsidies, you guarantee loans; we told you this would not secure you allies. You are fools, and we are wise. This I believe is not a weak summary of his charge against those he is inclined to condemn in every act, and impeach the motives when he cannot deny the effect. I ask, however, and put to the recollection of the house, whether those loans, subsidies, and alliances, were ever maintained on any such principle as that it

was impossible to be deceived. In the nature of the thing, no independent state can have security against another, from want of foresight and prudence. It is no imputation against our ally, that another might not see so acutely its own true permanent interest and safety. In the case of our acting with greater wisdom and resolution than others, we are not to let our regret at their misconduct over-rule our own satisfaction in our own prudence and sagacity. Even to this very moment I do not regret those loans, subsidies, and alliances, of which the right honourable gentleman complains. They were entered into with correct views of the real and permanent interest of the country: and though I could have wished that other powers had had a true sense of their own interest; yet as a matter of policy, I do not regret the advantage we derived even at the expense at which it was purchased.

When it is considered that the conduct of ministers with respect to peace, was such as those who wish for a change themselves approve, it is pretty certain that the real cause for their retirement is not that which is ostensibly assigned; but whether the motives be real or pretended, it can be no reason for postponing the present bill, as whether the present administration continue to yield their places to others, this bill, as a measure essential to the security of the country from the menaces and designs of a rancorous enemy, would be equally expedient and necessary. Suppose the right honourable gentleman was at the head of a new formed administration, would he tell the house that he would expect any success in this treaty, should the nation disarm, or be unprovided to continue the contest with vigour and effect? Where he minister, the same exertion would be necessary, the same question would revert, whether it was expedient to raise seven of the nineteen millions within the year. Is it therefore fair, or generous, or manly, to hear the possibility of a change assigned as a cause for delaying a measure, which under every administration, would be equally necessary, and must be equally made the subject of discussion? There must be some secret motive for this sudden exertion of the right honourable

gentleman. It was most probably to take advantage of what he supposed the public opinion, that he thus appeared again in embattled phalanx, and left the hidden path of secret warfare. With what other view would he otherwise bring into such a debate all the inflammatory topics he has urged, and in a speech of three or four hours, though attending, as he says, by the express commands of his constituents, scarce touch on the subject which he avowedly came forward to discuss? Instead of watching the details and particular bearings of this bill, he adverts only to its principle in the most general terms, and did not even attend in that stage in which alone, by means of regulations, he could alleviate those hardships of which his constituents complain. Far from observing the instructions he professed to obey, he enters into the most foreign and dissuasive questions concerning the origin and conduct of the war, in which, as usual, he decides in favour of France, and against this country, and in favour of himself and his party, against the ministers in whom his Majesty thought proper to confide. He wishes to impose on the hous the condition of putting off the discussion of the bill he was sent here to discuss, in order to enforce that radical reform of parliament and total change of system, of which his constituents in their instructions said nothing, and which if he thought it his duty to urge, he should have felt himself bound to attend for that purpose, without waiting for those injunctions which were the occasion of his presence.

I for one should be glad to have a clear idea of what the right honourable gentleman means by this species of reform and change. He has on former occasions expressed the same wishes, but yet in a way more general. In the course of what he has said on this subject to night, we have at least the satisfaction of learning that he looks only to these changes through the organ of parliament, which however he expects will not be effected by the power of his eloquence or the force of his reasoning within, but by the influence of the public mind from without. The precise plan of parliamentary reform, of which he is the advocate, is now for the first time disclosed, namely, that brought forward

last session by another honourable friend of his, not now in his place.* Thus for a plan of parliamentary reform, which the house had already discussed and rejected, and for other particular reformations, on which neither his constituents nor the public had expressed any opinion at all, he wished the house to suspend and hang up all the means of public defence, in a crisis of unexampled danger and difficulty. This mode of obtaining his objects is certainly less mild and regular than the one he professed himself attached to, and recommended with respect to parliamentary reform; for it tends to this—suspend your exertions, let the enemy come and make this change of system and reform the price of self-defence;—an expedient at least hazardous and rash under the present circumstances of the country. If, to avoid this inference, the right honourable gentleman should contend, that, by the influence of the public mind, he means the operation of the fair rational sense of the public mind on their representatives only, then he must admit that he has at last found something more sympathetic between the people and their representatives than he thinks it possible to discover in some views of the subject he occasionally takes, a consistent ground of virtual and effective representation, even in the present form of parliament. If he means neither of these, but something else different from both, but which he does not think it fit and prudent at this moment explicitly to state, his views are then evidently open to the objection, on the ground of ambiguity and indistinctness, which an honourable friend of mine† has said occasioned diffidence and alarm.

The right honourable gentleman has thought proper, on this, and several other occasions, to quote some words used by me in reference to this subject. It is impossible to recollect particular words used so long ago; but I frankly admit that my views of parliamentary reform were favourable to that object, and that I, on all occasions, expressed my opinion with all the warmth of expression I could use: these, however, must, in common can-

* Mr Grey. † Mr. Wilberforce.

dour, be understood in reference to that object as at that time understood, and not as to the change of meaning that expression has undergone in later times. He has done me the justice to say, that he believes it was not I who declared "that no good government could subsist, nor bad one be opposed with safety, without parliamentary reform." But whatever words I may have used, or to whatever doctrines I may have subscribed, they must be understood in reference only to the ideas of parliamentary reform then entertained, and I solemnly declare that whatever I may have said or done on that subject, had no relation to the present prevailing systems of reformation, or any principle on which they are founded. My ideas then were as different from those systems then, as my language is now. I always, as is well known to the right honourable gentleman, opposed every plan of universal suffrage and individual representation. All the words I then used, all the measures I then abetted, must be considered as bearing a relation to the ideas and views of things then entertained. By the same rate the right honourable gentleman must now be judged; the words he uses will be understood, unless otherwise restricted, by the ideas and views of things now received; and surely he cannot deny that the expressions he has this night made use of to signify his wishes, constitute the watch-words of a party out of doors, whose real meaning is well understood, and admits of no doubt. Is it not known that they couple their ideas with his words, and hail him as a convert to their system and a champion in their cause? If indeed the right honourable gentleman does mean something in a more limited and rational sense, sure I am, he must be thankful for that scrupulous vigilance and alarm that wishes to distinguish his views of a radical reform in parliament from those entertained by the Corresponding Society, expressing himself, as he accidentally does, in precisely the same words which that body has thought proper to adopt. It happens, however, that there is a further coincidence subsisting between that body and the right honourable gentleman than mere words. He has not only, they seem to think, exalted, like them, the representative government, but looks with a jea-

lous eye to nobility and hereditary honours; in short, disclaims every principle of government but the representative species. This, I believe, is well known to be their opinion of him, though undoubtedly he will contend that they misconceive the meaning of his words, and that they do not imply the object they suppose. Whatever may be his meaning on other points, he has now, however, fully explained the views he entertains of parliamentary reform; and I must declare that I would forego for ever all prospect of reform, rather than incur the risk of such an one as he wishes, by his own confession, may take place. What is it he contends for? No less than that the whole elective franchise should be taken from those in whom it has long resided, and transferred to all the householders in the kingdom. This is the preliminary, not only to all supply and exertion, but to other changes hitherto unlimited by any designation of their objects. After concealing his opinion for fourteen years, as to the specific plan of reform, it now appears no less than a total change of the old system of election, and a substitute that will at once demolish all the benefits connected with it. In short, he would take from the old electors all their rights, and invest them, without reserve, in new.

The right honourable gentleman has further expressed, as a general principle, that he wishes to repress increasing power, and encourage protecting liberty. In the first place, I wish to know what he means by these terms. I here remark the same uncertainty and ambiguity that appear in most of his professions, and which occasion no groundless degree of distrust and alarm in those who do not enter so readily into his views as others immediately around him. I wish to know what is this increasing power he wishes to reprobate, and what this protecting liberty he means to encourage? In another part of his speech he says, that the authority of parliament ought to be such as it was before the American war. Here also I am at a loss to reach the meaning of his words. I know of no liberty then possessed that is not now equally enjoyed. On professions so loose and indefinite, it would be absurd to rely, unless they are circumscribed by dis-

tinct meaning, they never can be adopted as a safe and rational ground of action.

Another commentator on the acts of government* has, in addition to the charges advanced by the right honourable gentleman, insisted, that an end shall be put to the possibility of making a breach in the appropriation act. This charge is not now for the first time brought forward. It was fully and regularly discussed on a former occasion, when first advanced; and how did it turn out?—that the appropriation-act had not been violated, but that, under particular circumstances, the form had been departed from to preserve its spirit. The same may be observed with respect to the charges advanced relative to barracks, and the laws concerning persons sent out of the kingdom; the right of assembling, petitioning, and all the other instances advanced as matters of criminal charges against the administration of government by his Majesty's present ministers, which at this late hour it will hardly be expected that I have strength sufficient minutely to examine and answer. The sum total of these objections amounts to this—that the house should at once repeal all those wise precautions and measures which, after an anxious view to the particular circumstances of the times, and an adequate discussion of each particular, they had thought proper to enact, not only with the consent of a vast majority of their own body, but with that of at least nine-tenths of the people out of doors. Is the house and country prepared for such sacrifices—such sweeping preliminaries?

The honourable gentleman objects also to the conduct of ministers with respect to peerages. Here, too, he is, as usual, general and indistinct. What is it he means? Does he intend to say the prerogative of the crown to create peers should be extinguished? How does he limit his objections? What exceptions are they that he makes? Does he mean that no vacancies should be filled up, that he may supply large arrears when he comes into power, in the way formerly used, when, as he says,

* Mr. Sheridan.

"peerage was given as an honour." Till particulars are mentioned, it is impossible to reply to such vague charges, which rather impeach the constitution than criminate the ministers. These, however, are the principal allegations, for which it is contended that ministers deserve to be dismissed from their offices, in order that others more competent to forward the national interests should serve the public in their stead.

If we pass the bill, the right honourable gentleman says that we shall not be considered as the representatives of the people, intimating thereby some doubt, at least, that we are not now the substantial and virtual representatives of that body. How does he make that assertion good? Because, he says, large meetings of the people have expressed their disapprobation of the bill; and therefore, if we do not adopt their opinions, he infers we have no sympathy with them, and in no sense whatever can be called their representatives. In the first place, I must observe, that these meetings were only held in the metropolis: that in other parts of the kingdom no disapprobation has been expressed, and that, even in the metropolis itself, the opposition has a good deal subsided since the modifications, which have removed the principal causes of objection. In the next place, I shall never agree that this house, as the representatives of the people, are bound to bend to every partial and unsettled opinion of that body. I mean not to deny that we should give due weight to the influence of public opinion; but it never was the principle of the constitution, that the representatives of the people should shift with every breath of popular desire. Nothing could be more inconsistent with true wisdom and public utility, than that the legislators should be influenced by every fleeting and partial expression of the public will. How easy was it in the present case, by misrepresentation, and an imperfect view of the bill in its operation, to raise in the first instance a popular clamour against it! A general disinclination towards it appeared in the public meetings within the metropolis; but no sooner was the subject fully understood, and its particular hardships removed, than it was regarded in a very different light, as appeared

by the proceedings of the common hall in the city, and other parts. The gentlemen opposite to me are ready enough, on all occasions, not only to condemn the conduct of his Majesty's ministers, but also to make the public a party to their cause. I have not only a right to consider them as prejudiced in this respect, but, from frequent experience, erroneous also; for in many cases where they have as loudly maintained the public opinion was with them, on a fair inquiry, where occasion offered, we have found the fact to be directly the reverse. Is it in the nature of things, that a heavy and general tax can, in the first instance, be popular? And, on the contrary, it ever must be the easiest of all things, by artifice and misrepresentation, to raise a clamour against any such measure on its first breaking upon the public mind. It is hardly possible for such a tax to be popular and cheerfully received. All taxes are necessarily hardships, and must be submitted to, not from pleasure, but a sense of public duty: and I hope with confidence that this tax will be so received by the good sense and fortitude of the people; and that, when it comes to be explained and amended, they will submit to the sacrifices it enjoins, as a measure of urgent necessity, under circumstances of the most severe trial that this nation ever experienced. It does not, however, enter into my ideas of public duty, that the legislature should consult the popular opinion at the expense of public safety.

There was one part of the right honourable gentleman's speech that I am impelled to notice, from the extraordinary request it contained. He admitted the great use of unanimity, and allowed, that in this critical period in particular it was highly desirable. The mode, however, in which he means to obtain it is, in my opinion, somewhat singular. He says, we the minority conceiving ourselves right, will not yield to you, the majority, but, as unanimity is desirable, you should undoubtedly come over to our opinion. So that the majority are thus called upon at once to forego their opinions, though adopted after long and frequent debate, and to tread back all their steps, and admit themselves to be wrong, although they knew themselves to be right! This

was the reasonable request his arguments conveyed; and we were told that a zealous unanimity was to be expected on no other terms. In like manner he requires us to postpone the bill indefinitely, though arising from urgent necessity, and calculated for security and defence, until he shall in his own good time return to his parliamentary duty, and, as occasion suits, unfold to our view, for separate discussion, all the parts of that radical change in our system which he projects.

As to the principles of individual conduct in this house, it is not now a general question of how far a member is authorised to secede from his attendance; but, in my opinion, that virtual representation, of which the right honourable gentleman is so fond, cannot be more completely violated than by a dereliction of duty, particularly in a moment of imminent danger to the country. And this is doubtless aggravated if it should be done with a view of depreciating the body of which he is a member, and to alienate the affections of the people from it. I can hardly conceive how a man can act in grosser violation of his duty as a member of parliament than by such a conduct. Much of the fact, in such a case, must be collected from attendant circumstances. I shall not now inquire by what motives those gentlemen acted (Mr. Burke and others), alluded to by the right honourable gentlemen, who seceded in the American war; but I recollect that his own secession was announced after the motion made by an honourable gentleman * for parliamentary reform; and that, in the course of that debate, the right honourable gentleman said, that, unless the measures were adopted, the house would not be any longer entitled to the respect of the people out of doors. As to the general principle, nothing can be more certain than that it is a violation of duty to desert a post committed to one's charge, and that it increases, in exact proportion to the danger of those for whom we undertake the charge. Now it did so happen, that the right honourable gentleman could not, in his whole political career, have chosen a moment of secession more

* Mr. Grey.

encompassed with danger than the one in which he actually did secede. The motive, therefore, is at best suspicious, and declining to attend under such circumstances led at least to inquiry, whether by keeping away he sought opportunities to reflect that, by inflaming the people without these walls, which no exertion of his talents could achieve within. He retired just as the rancour of our enemy became most inveterate, and exclusively directed to this country, and when the manifestation of their malice called forth the spirit and zeal of all classes to support our national independence and honour. Just at this juncture it was that the right honourable gentleman thought proper to retire.

On what ground is it that gentlemen oppose this bill? Do they deny the danger that surrounds us? Do they maintain that exertion is not necessary? that it can be suspended with safety? No; they do not attempt to do either; but, as the means of obtaining their own objects, they are willing to risk the honour, welfare, and existence of the country. The right honourable gentleman had asserted his right to secede on his own motives of expediency, and, of course, those who surround him will not object if I take their justification on the same principle; but the right honourable gentleman, it seems, retains his opinion of that expediency, and only now appears at the particular injunction of his constituents to defend their local interest. How comes it, then, that he appears so surrounded with friends, who, adopting his principle of secession, have not, in the desire of their constituents, the same motive for his particular exception? Can any thing shew in a stronger light the blind acquiescence of party zeal, when, in defiance of every avowed principle of their public conduct, they now attend to add to the splendour of their leader's entry.

There is one point in the constitution of this country, in which difference of opinion arises, namely, concerning the instructions of constituents to their representatives. Some think themselves bound to obey them, whatever their individual opinion may be on the subject. Others thinking those instructions entitled to their respect, yet follow the dictates of their own consciences.

Of this latter class the right honourable gentleman professes himself to be. According, therefore, to his own admission, he now attends in spite of his own opinion of the expediency of secession, to discuss the local interest of his constituents. He, nevertheless, declined attending in that stage of the bill in which alone he could be of service in that particular, by proposing reliefs for the particular hardships his constituents might sustain; and now, without noticing the modifications made, he objects to other particulars, without suggesting or moving any remedy! He came here to oppose its local and partial effect, yet indulges only in a general and indiscriminate opposition to it; and professing to come for the express purpose of discussing this bill, he introduces every topic that has been decided during the long period of his absence! The house must therefore decide in what spirit, and for what real purpose he now appears. Nothing that he has said can be understood as touching in any degree the question now before us. He may, indeed, be said to reproach his Majesty's ministers, but can with no propriety be said to speak to the subject for which his constituents directed him to attend.

With respect to many objections urged in the course of the debate, I must say, in general, that if gentlemen had attended in the proper stage of the bill, they would have heard them answered. It is not that the objections are unanswerable, but they have not heard the answers that have been given, by neglecting to attend when it was their duty to be present. Upon the question of a great and unusual exertion, no doubt is made; all agree that it is indispensable. Now, if this is to be made, the next inquiry is, in what manner is it to be done? From whence arises this secondary question, whether it is to be done in the usual mode of raising supplies, or by raising a considerable proportion of the sum requisite for the current services within the year? Upon this latter question the right honourable gentleman is dubious; his honourable friend* thinks that a sum

* Mr. Sheridan.

should be raised by a great exertion within the year. There is one objection to the present plan not easy to comprehend, namely, that by this mode of exertion I only relieve the stocks so as to affect a few particular friends of ministers; for the old stockholders, who bought in before the war, it is said, cannot be hurt, inasmuch as they manifest an intention of retaining their capital and receive the same interest; therefore no depreciation of the funds can affect them. This, however, is a very fallacious and defective view of the subject; for property, the nature of which is transferable, must always depend on the value of that transfer? Is it nothing to prevent the depreciation of 200,000,000*l.* in capital, or can that be said to affect only a few particular friends of a minister? If further loans are to be made for the public service, is it of no consequence whether the funds are at 40 or 48 per cent? Does it make no difference whether money is borrowed for the public at 4, 5, or 6 per cent? Has the price of stocks no effect on commerce and agriculture, if they fall below a certain point? According to this plan, it is not property that is directly taxed, but expenditure is made the criterion of income in its application. I admit that some inequalities will be found; but so there must in every plan of raising a considerable sum within the year, and this only forms an objection to the plan in case it can be shewn that the same sum can be raised by means less partial and irregular. There have been instances of large sums raised within the year, but in no instance by means less liable to the objection of irregularity.

On the whole, the house will decide whether they will, under the present circumstances of the country, make a great and unusual exertion to resist the enemy, or whether, on the arguments they have heard, they will suspend all defensive precautions, and leave the country open to the ruinous projects of an insolent and overbearing enemy. Notwithstanding the right honourable gentleman has intimated his intention to persevere in his retirement, I leave this question to the house, in full confidence that they will decide on this, and on every other occasion, in such a

way as most effectually to support the independence and permanent interest of the country.

The House divided, and the question for the third reading of the bill passed in the affirmative;

Ayes 196
Noes 71

April 2, 1798.

Redemption of the Land-Tax.—The House having resolved itself into a committee of the whole House, Mr. Hobart in the chair,

Mr. Pitt rose and spoke in substance as follows:

The subject which I am now about to submit to the committee, has of late excited considerable attention, and given rise to considerable inquiry. As the ultimate judgment which the committee will form upon it, must depend upon the consideration of a great variety of details, it is not my intention to call upon you for any decision to-day. I trust, however, that the principle upon which the measure is founded, only requires to be very shortly stated, in order to engage your attention, and to recommend itself to your notice. That, in the present situation of the country, every measure which tends to invigorate public credit, which will facilitate the means of supporting that struggle into which we were driven for our necessary defence, and which has been prolonged by the obstinate ambition of the enemy; that every measure which will furnish fresh resources to animate the courage of the nation, and to enable us to maintain that character which Englishmen have ever displayed, has a fair claim to the favour of the legislature, I am warranted to pronounce, from the experience of the present session, the unanimity you have shewn upon former occasions, and the recent exertions you have made for the public defence. When I recollect, then, the temper which parliament has uniformly manifested, I am sensible that it is needless to say any thing in recommendation of the principle, provided the measure itself be practicable. The leading object of

the plan which I shall have the honour to propose, is to absorb a great quantity of stock, to transfer a considerable portion of the funded security to landed security, and, by the redemption of the present land tax, to purchase a quantity of stock more than equivalent to the amount of the tax. That tax will be made applicable in the same manner as at present, but the proportion of stock it will purchase will be one fifth larger, presenting at once a considerable pecuniary gain to the public, and an advantage to the individual by whom the redemption shall be made. The chief recommendation of the plan, however, is, that it will diminish the capital stock, and remove that which presses more severely upon us than any inconvenience with which our situation is attended. It is a truth now universally felt, a truth which the enemy have acknowledged, and which faction itself will not venture to deny, that even in this stage of the war, the state of every part of our trade, our industry, and revenue, is astonishing and proud for this country; that our general capital and wealth is greater than they were even at its commencement; that our commerce, so far from having experienced a diminution as in other wars, has greatly increased; that our industry and manufactures, subject to those local fluctuations which are inseparable from a system so extended and diversified, have sensibly advanced; and that, on a general view, our situation exhibits every symptom of internal wealth, that we are richer, that we possess a greater command of capital than this country ever enjoyed at any former period. It is singular too, that under the depreciation which the funds have experienced, the price of land has maintained itself above the average of former wars, and equal to the price in times of peace; very little indeed below the unexampled state of a few years preceding the war.

I am aware that no argument is required to demonstrate the necessity of great exertion in the circumstances in which we are now placed. You have already expressed your opinion of that necessity, and have shewn your readiness to employ our resources. All then that is wanting is judgment and discrimination in the mode of calling them into action. If there be any

chance of diminishing the capital of the funded debt, which is the only pressure by which our efforts are embarrassed, the measure, by which it is to be effected is founded upon clear and substantial principles of policy. This is a principle upon which the house has acted in the course of the present session. Upon this principle you felt the expediency of making an extraordinary exertion to raise, within the year, a considerable part of the supplies. It is a further satisfaction for us to know, that the energy of the measure has been fully proved; that though difficult in detail, though encountered by considerable opposition on its appearance, and many obstacles in its progress, its advantages have been recognised by the country. Though necessary to qualify it by many modifications, which diminished the full effect it was intended to have, yet the voluntary zeal of the country has borne testimony to the principle; and the contributions with which the patriotism of individuals has come forward for the public defence, furnishes the best proof, that in this measure, the legislature was in unison with the sentiments of the people. From what I have heard, the objection to the measure of increasing the assessed taxes has been, that it did not go far enough; and commercial men have declared, that it did not embrace sufficiently that species of property of which they are possessed. Whatever may be the decision of the house, as to the principle of the plan which I am about to propose, I am sure that any measures which tend to give effect to the same object, which will combine an annual saving with other collateral advantages, which, without imposing any new burdens upon the public, will be attended with considerable benefit to the nation as well as individuals, cannot fail to be received with the highest favour by this house, and to secure the approbation of the country.

In stating the principle upon which the plan proceeds, I am aware that I have claimed a great deal of merit to the measure. in this, however, I claim none from the proposal. The principle itself possesses that recommendation which usually belongs to good principles, that it is so simple that the advantages which

are produced by its effects do not necessarily suppose a great share of merit in the proposer.

The amount of the present land-tax is about 2,000,000*l.* This sum has been annually granted by parliament for a century past, and has been levied at the same rate in different districts. The repartition which was originally made has continued so long, and the sum of 4*s.* in the pound for so considerable a period has never been exceeded, that it will be readily acknowledged that this sum ought not to be diminished, at least till many other burdens which weigh more heavily upon the public have been taken off. Taking this state then as that upon which the present land-tax is raised, it is proposed, by changing the security of a part of the funded capital into landed security, to cover the two millions of existing land-tax by two millions four hundred thousand of dividends. By this measure it is evident that, upon the supposition that the whole of the land-tax were to be redeemed, the public would gain 400,000*l.* The terms upon which the purchase is intended to be made, while they produce this benefit to the public, will present that advantage to the land owners, which will render it eligible for them to redeem, and tempt them to give full effect to the measure. Eighty millions would thus be taken out of the market, and the public credit, relieved by so great a pressure, would be proportionably strengthened. Having stated this brief outline, I shall advert to a few of the objections against the measure, which have yet come to my knowledge.

It is obvious that the first step necessarily involved in the measure is to render the present land-tax perpetual, universally redeemable, and where not redeemed, always subject to redemption according to certain regulations. There is one objection which at once suggests itself, and to which a very satisfactory answer occurs. I mean the objection that may be made on constitutional grounds. It may be said that, to render a grant which is now annual, perpetual, is to remove the constitutional checks of parliament over the public expense, and to render perpetual what is now voted as an annual supply. I do not deny

that the adoption of the present measure would create some alteration, but the objection upon the constitutional ground is very easily removed. Nothing can be more easy than to place under the annual controul of parliament funds that are at present permanent, equivalent to those which are taken away by this measure. Certain branches of the consolidated fund may be made annual, even to a greater amount than two millions of land-tax. This would answer every purpose of constitutional controul. Ministers would not then have it in their power to apply money without consent of parliament more than before. It is my intention, therefore, to move a particular resolution to obviate this objection. Such funds as parliament may judge most expedient for the purpose of controul may be selected and submitted to annual vote in the same manner as the land-tax, and instead of two millions, the sum may be augmented to the full amount of the dividends which will be taken out of the market. Parliament will thus have the annual controul of 2,400,000*l*. By this means it will so happen that the constitutional check of this house will for some years be more, and never will be less, than it was before.

Another objection urged by some is, that from the present repartition to perpetrate the existing land-tax would be to perpetrate an inequality which is so great as to form no inconsiderable abuse. They say, that if the tax were equalized, they would have no objection to render it perpetual. Let us consider this objection more closely and attentively. Since the revolution, especially during the latter part which has succeeded, it has never been in contemplation to equalize the land-tax by a new repartition according to the real amount of property, and the ability of different districts. We know that in this house, though the vote for the land-tax had the undoubted right to adopt a new repartition, no such proposition was ever made. With the experience of a century before us, then, if we have seen no such attempt ever made, is it more likely that it would be corrected, even were the vote to be annual, than if the grant were made perpetual?

I do not now argue whether it would have been right to devise

the repartition at present established. I am ready to admit that I consider it to have been an original defect of the present plan of repartition, that no periodical revision was fixed. I think that it would have been wise to have made such a provision, and that it would have been happy for the country had it been done. Two important guards would be necessary; to prevent the inequality from being too great, and at the same time not to discourage improvement. That principle, however, not being at first recognised, and property having been since transferred without any attention to it, would it now be wise, just, or popular, to make a new valuation? I think not. If so many years experience has shewn that no inclination to establish a different repartition prevailed, ought we to allow much weight to the objection, that to perpetuate the tax would be to perpetuate the inequality.

I have likewise heard, that it has been objected that this very measure would tend to introduce an equal repartition. It ought not to be expected that these opposite objections will come from the same quarter, and that a grievance will be felt both ways. It does happen, however, that the same mind embraces opposite and contradictory objections. Those who are determined to object to every thing, may continue to bring forward in a regular opposition arguments against a measure which do not proceed upon the same principle. On the present occasion, however, I do not expect that this mode of attack will be employed; at least I do not anticipate such a mode of opposition from any of those I now see before me. The question, then, is, does the present measure give any new facility for the introduction of a general land-tax? If the measure did give any new facility for employing the substantial resources of the country, and deriving additional means of strength without distressing the people, I should be more disposed to claim it as a recommendation, than to consider it as a defect. In times like the present, whatever supplies us with the means of calling into action the real resources of the country, and giving new energy to the contest we maintain, would deserve the cordial support of every man who is a friend to the happiness and prosperity of the country, and in a particu-

lar manner of those who would be the greatest sufferers, if the hostile designs of the enemy were to succeed.

The measure to be proposed to you, however, possesses no such recommendation. It leaves the question of a more equal repartition of the land-tax precisely where it found it. Parliament now has the undoubted right to raise more than four shillings in the pound on the land; and what greater authority would it acquire were the present redeemed? If the whole were to be redeemed, for it would be sanguine to suppose that the whole will be redeemed within a few years by the owners, the only thing necessary to be provided as expressly as any legislative provision can guard, is, that if ever a new land-tax is imposed, it shall not be imposed upon those who have redeemed in any different proportion from that on those who have not redeemed. It would be necessary to provide that the amount of what may have been redeemed should be deducted from any new impost. It appears to me that such a provision would secure those who shall take the benefit of redemption as much from any additional charge in future on that account, as those who had not bought up their land-tax at all. This, then, appears a sufficient answer to the general objections which have been suggested against the measure. As to the various details which it embraces, it would be idle to enter into any minute discussion of them, till the committee has had further time to take them into mature consideration.

There is one objection, however, which is partly connected with the detail of the measure, and partly applies as a general objection. This regards the option to be given in the second instance to become a purchaser of the tax, provided the owner himself should be unwilling or unable to buy. Cases may occur in which the proprietor finds it inconvenient to make the advances necessary for the redemption. Great pains, however, have been taken to lighten this inconvenience. Every attention has been paid to give the landholder all the advantages consistent with the ultimate success of the scheme. It is of infinite importance to gain during the war every benefit which the measure is calculated to afford; it is of the utmost impor-

tance to secure that assistance to credit, which will supply us with the means of that resistance which our independence, our property, and our happiness calls upon us to make. For this reason the landholder ought to have no unlimited and exclusive privilege in the purchase of his tax, though the terms will be such as to render it highly beneficial for him to become the purchaser himself. To enable him to take the benefit held out to him, every facility will be given him for raising money, and even should he lose the first opportunity of purchase, the redemption of the tax will not be hopeless. A period should be fixed at which he shall have the liberty to redeem, though on his refusal, a third party in the first instance has become the purchaser.

Such are the views upon which the plan is founded. As to the terms upon which the purchase is to be made, I shall explain them very shortly. Payment of the redemption will not be demanded in money, but will be received in transfer of stock to the commissioners for liquidating the national debt. This mode has the advantage of accommodating itself to the fluctuation of stock, and each transaction liquidates itself. The present price of three per cents. being about 50, affords an interest to purchasers of six per cent. At this rate stock sells at from 16 to 17 years' purchase, and the tax will be sold at 20 years' purchase. Every pound of annual tax, therefore, will be equal to 40*l.* capital stock. Should stocks rise to 75 the purchase will be 30 years, and the rate of purchase will thus vary one year with every variation of two and a half per cent. in the price of stock. From this statement of the comparative purchase of the stock and tax, it is evident that the public gains one-fifth of the purchase by the transfer of stock.

As far as the landholder is concerned, the question then is, whether 20 years' purchase will present a sufficient inducement to redeem, and whether 20 years be a sufficient advantage for what he parts with at 17 years' purchase. This rests wholly upon the supposed difference between landed and funded security. Landed property in general throughout the kingdom sells at from 28 to 30 years' purchase; funded at present from 16 to 17. We are giving landed security for funded, and at the rate of

20 years' purchase. At this rate the share of advantage to the public is small, to the individual it is very considerable, if the advantage purchased is considered of the same description as landed property. I do not say, however, that it is exactly of the same description as landed property; they are to be distinguished by their respective advantages and disadvantages. The benefit to the purchaser by redemption is less valuable than landed property in this respect; it is dry and unimprovable possession. Land, however, is improvable, and it sells not only on its present value, but on the calculation of progressive improvement and speculative advantage. Other temptations to the purchase of land are command, influence, amusement, pleasure, occupation, according to the temper and disposition of the purchaser. It cannot be said, however, that the purchase of this benefit is rendered more valuable by any of these advantages. It should be recollected at the same time, that the purchase of the tax, if not absolutely the acquisition of enjoyment—if not a freedom from vexation, is freedom from something which a man would wish to be without. It has this advantage too, that if not susceptible of improvement, it is attended with no risk. The purchaser is exempted from the care of management and the trouble of collection, and taking all the advantages and disadvantages together, it may be considered as a purchase of a very desirable nature. While the owner is thus induced to become the purchaser, the public, as we have seen, derives a very considerable benefit from the transaction.

The next part of the plan is to give a facility to the possessor of land also to become a purchaser. For this purpose it is intended to give the tenant for life or in tail, the same power to raise the money by burdening the property as proprietor in fee, provided, however, that the money so raised shall be strictly applied to the purchase of the tax. It is even intended to allow them to give a rent charge upon the property to the amount, if convenient, to increase the facility of the possessor becoming the purchaser. It is likewise proposed to give the proprietors of settled estates power to sell such a portion of the estate as shall

enable them to pay off the purchase of the tax, providing that the money shall be strictly applied for that purpose.

Giving these facilities to the possessor to become the purchaser in the first instance, it appears necessary to fix a certain period, after which, if they decline, third parties may buy. To these the terms shall be the same as to the owners. Landholders, however, are to have this superior advantage, that five years shall be allowed for the payment of the instalments. At the same time, however, if they shall avail themselves of this indulgence, they shall pay interest on the instalments, in order to compensate to the public for the non-extinction at this period of the purchase. Purchasers, not owners, are to pay up their instalments within one year.

It is necessary, therefore, in order to call the means of resource thus furnished into action, to take third parties where the landlords decline. That the situation of such third parties may not be too precarious, and that they may not be too easily divested of the property they have acquired, some provisions must be adopted by which they may be secured, and at the same time the power of redemption preserved to the original owner. It is difficult exactly to say what medium will balance the right to be given to these two parties, which will present to the monied men the temptation to buy, and reserve to the owner the power of redemption. The monied man must be induced to purchase by the difference which he supposes to exist between funded and landed property. This difference is greater or less according as the times are critical or tranquil. Land does not vary in time of war in the same proportion as funded property. Those who make a distinction in the value of land, do it upon its being less liable to fluctuation, and not upon any circumstance affecting the permanent value of stock. If then a third person shall purchase, the owner shall not be at liberty to redeem till a period arrives when the monied man shall be willing to return his money into stock, and the landholder shall have the means of raising money for his redemption. This period will be at the happy moment when, having surmounted the difficulties with which we have to struggle, and triumphed

in the contest in which we are engaged, the consolidated fund shall have attained its maximum, and being no longer allowed to accumulate at compound interest, the dividends shall be made applicable by parliament. This will be when the consolidated fund shall be 4,200,000*l.* Supposing then that by the exertions which we have made, and continue to make, we should go through the difficulties we have to encounter, and pass with success through this crisis of our fate, when the public debt shall be met by the consolidated fund there must be an end of all doubt of public credit; there must be an end of all question of national securities, of all distinction between landed and funded property.—That moment, then, when least discouraging for the monied man to revert to the funded security, shall be fixed for the owner to avail himself of that redemption which circumstances had at first made impossible. If not redeemed within a given time, however, it becomes material to render the property permanent with the purchaser, to the exclusion of the owner. Three years, then, after the expiring of the ten years, at the close of which the power of redemption is permitted to the owner, seems to be a fair extension of the privilege. It would give to the owner an opportunity to purchase, of which, from his circumstances, he was unable to avail himself on the first offer.—It will give him time for preparation for domestic arrangements, and for raising the necessary funds. Thus no party will have reason to complain of his situation. Provisions are made to secure to each the advantages which he will be most likely to prefer.

In the transaction the situation of the monied man is precisely this. During a period of difficulty and danger, he has got a landed security instead of that of the funds. This case, however, will require two regulations; first, that if any person, not the owner, has purchased by the transferring of an annuity, he shall be paid the same quantity of stock upon the redemption, which he had transferred without regard to the price of such stock. Thus, supposing he had transferred to the public in payment when stock was at 50, and in the interval it should rise to 75,

he will derive all the advantage from the rise, and may thus realize fifty per cent. upon his capital. At the same time he is to have no risk in case of a depreciation of the funds. Should they fall below 50, he is to be reimbursed to the extent of the difference. The situation of the stockholder who becomes a purchaser of the tax is precisely this, that he is speculating upon a rise without any hazard of loss from depreciation.

I have stated these points to shew the general tendency of the measure. It will now be seen, that it is liable to no general objections which do not admit of a remedy; that the difficulties in the detail are not such as to impede its progress; that the advantage to the public is considerable, and the benefit accruing to the individual such as will render it an object for him to purchase. While the monied man is induced to come forward to assist the state by purchasing the tax, a remedy is reserved to the owner, to enable him, at a fixed period, to repair the disappointment he may have sustained from his original inability.

A variety of details must be involved in a measure like the present, but there are none which appear to be attended with great difficulty. On the present plan of repartition, the amount of particular districts remains unaltered, though it may vary within the district, with the improvement or decline of the various parts. In the metropolis and considerable towns this is particularly the case. In the parish of Mary-la-bonne the extensive improvements has rendered the repartition lighter, while in other districts it may become heavier from an opposite cause. Provision, therefore, must be made for the situation of an owner purchasing in the different cases of increase or decline.

The most advisable regulation certainly would be, that of leaving it to the option of the owner, whether he will redeem it at the present price that shall be offered to him, or take it according to any future assessment to which it may be subject; the augmentation to which, as it is intended to be proportioned to the present local inequalities in the land-tax, will nearly produce the same effect as if that impracticable plan of a general equalization was to be adopted. But in case of a third person purchasing a part

of this tax, he shall be entitled to receive an abatement proportioned to the fund which he may give in exchange for the tax. Therefore it will be extremely material to consider who the purchasers are to be; whether the land-owners, or other persons not having any property in the land; to see what circumstances may belong to particular places, and whether there may not be a great surcharge in some parishes, and none in others. But it is not necessary for me now to enter into those minute circumstances, which may be better discussed when the business shall come before the house for its consideration, and which will be introduced by way of regulation into any bill that may be brought in, if the house shall agree to the resolutions I mean to bring forward. It would also be desirable to allow a person to purchase not only a certain portion of the tax, but a given share of a district.

These are the circumstances of the case which I have to lay before the house, and which I have conveyed in as short a statement as I was able. The object is one which requires consideration. In the first opening of the matter I avoided going into any minute detail; and although I feel it a matter of propriety in the out line, and such as deserves at least a favourable hearing, yet I wish it to be examined carefully, weighed dispassionately and deliberately, and that parliament may consider, whether it is not such a measure as they ought in their wisdom to adopt at this arduous moment. I shall follow the practice I have observed in other instances with respect to the form of proceeding; that of moving the first resolution, and afterwards all the others in point of form, and then postpone the consideration of the substance of the plan to another day. I should propose taking the opinion of the house upon them on Thursday; and then that the whole subject should go over until after the holidays, in order that gentlemen may take them into the country, and have an opportunity of conversing with their constituents, and learning whether any local circumstance may, in any case, render alteration necessary. I should now, without any farther trouble to the committee,

move the first resolution; but perhaps the committee would wish to hear a statement of the heads of the resolutions.

The first resolution declares that the land-tax should be rendered perpetual, subject to certain modes of restriction, regulation, and redemption.

The second provides for the appointment of commissioners to sell the land-tax upon the terms and at the rate I have already stated.

The third gives power and preference to the owners of land to purchase the land-tax according to the nature of the interest they have in the estate, whether a fee or otherwise, and that in the event of the person in possession declining to purchase, the next in succession, or the person in remainder, may do so. And that any third person may make such a purchase for the owner, &c.

The fourth gives power to owners to sell part of their estates, or raise money by way of rent-charge to enable them to purchase the tax.

The fifth gives power to third persons, the owner of the land having declined it for a given period, to purchase the tax.

The sixth describes the mode in which the payment shall be made.

The seventh regulates the power of the collectors in receiving the money.

The eighth limits the time during which the power of redemption shall continue.

The ninth imposes a penalty on those who purchase and do not make good the payment of their instalments.

The tenth provides that if any assessment which shall continue to be charged shall be found to exceed 4*s*. in the pound on the annual value of the messuages, &c. an abatement shall be made.

The eleventh prescribes in what manner a register shall be kept for entering proceedings under this plan.

The twelfth provides that when the whole land-tax shall be brought up, the assessment shall cease.

The thirteenth transfers the business of the commissioners, appointed to carry into effect the plan for the reduction of the national debt.

The fourteenth provides, that in case any additional land-tax should be imposed, it shall not operate heavier on those who have purchased the former tax than on others.

The fifteenth contains an account of the sum of 1,400,000*l.* which it is intended to produce annually.

This is the proper statement of the heads of the resolutions which I propose to be discussed hereafter; but if any gentleman has any thing to offer now, I should be glad to hear him.

After some discussion of the measure, the chairman reported progress, and the committee was ordered to sit again on Wednesday.

April 20, 1798.

A message from his Majesty was brought down by Mr. Secretary Dundas, and read from the chair as follows:

"GEORGE R.

"His Majesty thinks it proper to acquaint the House of Commons, that from various advices received by his Majesty, it appears that the preparations for the embarkation of troops and warlike stores, are now carried on with considerable and increasing activity in the ports of France, Flanders, and Holland, with the avowed design of attempting the invasion of his Majesty's dominions, and that in this design the enemy is encouraged by the correspondence and communication of traitorous and disaffected persons and societies of these kingdoms. His Majesty places the firmest reliance, under Divine Providence, on the bravery of his fleets and armies, and on the zeal, public spirit, and unshaken courage, of his faithful people, already manifested in the voluntary exertions of all ranks of his Majesty's subjects for the general defence, and more than ever necessary at a moment when they are called upon to contend for the preservation of all that is dear to them.

"His Majesty, in pursuance of the act passed in the last session of parliament, for raising a provisional force of cavalry, has thought it right to give directions, that the said cavalry should be drawn out and embodied; and it is also his Majesty's intention, to order the part not yet embodied of the aug-

mentation made to the militia, under the acts of last session, to be forthwith drawn out and embodied, in pursuance of his Majesty's communications already made to the House of Commons on this subject.

"His Majesty feels it incumbent on him to make the fullest use of the extensive means already provided by the wisdom of parliament for the national defence. But he feels it at the same time, under circumstances which he has stated, indispensably necessary to recommend it to the House of Commons, to consider without delay of such farther measures as may enable his Majesty to defeat the wicked machinations of disaffected persons within these realms, and to guard against the designs of the enemy, either abroad or at home.

"G. R."

Mr. Dundas then moved an address of thanks to his Majesty in the language of the message, which was seconded by Mr. Pitt.

After Mr. Sheridan had spoken in warm approbation of the address, and in a tone and language calculated to animate the exertions of the country, at this important crisis,

Mr. PITT rose to reply:

Being so well satisfied with certain parts of the speech of the honourable gentleman who has just spoken; admiring, as I do, in common with the rest of the house, the energy, the vigour, the manliness and eloquence, which were displayed in that speech, I should be extremely unwilling to take notice of other parts of it in which we differ; but I beg to be understood, it is because I do think unanimity valuable upon the present occasion, and at this moment, in this house, that I shall abstain from comments upon parts of that speech, to which I cannot assent. I had much rather express satisfaction at the present opinion of the honourable gentleman, from whatever ground it has arisen, that his opinion has been changed with respect to the conduct, which this country ought to observe with regard to France; I am glad that he now at least agrees with us in the necessity of resisting the arms of France, and in calling on every man to join in that resistance.—I say, I had rather do so than enter into the discussion of other points in which I differ from that honourable gentleman. I will not suffer myself to follow him over many of the various topics which he has introduced to night. The merit of his disinterestedness I do not mean to de-

tract from, because he has candidly stated, that while he gives his assistance to us in the present crisis, he does not approve of any part of our conduct which he has formerly censured. I, therefore, receive his aid now, as I am confident he intended it to be received, as a testimony of his public spirit. I am more convinced now than ever that that which now animates the zeal, calls forth the ardour, and occasions the display of the eloquence of that honourable gentleman, is owing to the conduct of France; that which now produces unanimity in this house and in this country is nothing more than a display of those principles, a developement of that character, which belonged originally to the French revolution—an event which, for a while, unfortunately had the countenance of that honourable gentleman, but which was then resisted by the nation at large; a resistance which, if not made earlier than the period of the honourable gentleman's conviction of its propriety, would have been too late: even unanimity itself would then have been useless, and the honourable gentleman would have been left without a place for the display of his abilities in this house. I must also say, that although I do not wish to detract from his talents; although I admire his eloquence, and revere the wisdom of some part of his conduct this night; although I rejoice in the unanimity which we are likely to have upon this occasion, yet it is not to the wisdom, or to the splendid display of talents, or to the animated zeal of an individual, that we are to look for safety; it can only be considered as giving aid to the efforts of millions acting under the clearest necessity. That honourable gentleman, therefore, will not think I should depreciate him, or any other individual, if I said it was adding but little to the efforts of a nation nearly unanimous before; a nation which did not want that honourable gentleman to tell them, they are contending for liberty, for order, for property, for honour, for law, for religion, and even for existence. They would have been happy to have had him contending with them from the commencement of this contest; they would, however, have been able to have gone on without him. While I say this, let

me give that gentleman the praise and thanks that are due to him for setting the example he has done; for, be it recollected, he has set an example of unanimity in this house for opposing the common enemy; let us allow the credit that is due to him; but let us not do such injustice to the zeal and the energy of the country as to doubt, that England was as secure before this unanimity as it is now, and as I trust it will be after it.

On the subject of Ireland, the honourable gentleman says he will make a motion on some future day. I will venture to say, that when that subject comes to be discussed, if Ireland forms now part of the weakness, instead of the strength, of the British empire, it is because those very French principles, the fatal influence of which that honourable gentleman has stated to-night, in a strain of energy and captivating eloquence which I will not weaken by attempting to repeat his words—it is owing, I say, to these French principles, which found their way into that kingdom, where the arts of deception, from various causes, are more easily practised, and are more successful than in this. I will therefore say, that with every desire, with every wish, to see adopted a system of conciliation with Ireland, when that may be practicable, I must tell him, that if he means by a peace with Ireland, peace with those who are devoted to the French, I think that would be as mean a capitulation, as that which he described with respect to our submitting to a foreign yoke: I say, you may as well expect peace with a French army at the gates of London, as peace with the jacobins in Ireland.

If I doubted any thing on the subject of French ambition, which was introduced by that honourable gentleman, it was upon the reserve which he made for treating with the French after an invasion. I know no situation which can justify a nation of freemen under any circumstances, in making a treaty of capitulation, or surrender of liberty and independance to the mercy of the enemy; and it is a sentiment in the heart of every Englishman, a law beyond any statute, that it would be high treason for this country to treat with France, while a single regiment of French forces remained in England. I must apply

the same feelings and the same sentiments with regard to Ireland.

And now, as to the other only point which I intend to notice in the speech of the honourable gentleman, I mean the state of a conspiracy in this country; he has said, that much might be known to government which is not known to him. I know that much is known to government which cannot be known to him upon that subject. I know that the country at large is sensible, that there is a body of men, too considerable in number and activity for government to pass by them unnoticed; men who are going on with the daring purpose of corresponding with the French, for establishing a spirit of republicanism in this country, under the auspices of a foreign force. This is supported by the conduct of our enemies; we can see nothing of the proceedings of our enemies; we can see none of the speeches of their leaders, in which it is not attempted to animate the French people to invade this country; no temptation to make their armies embark; no endeavour to prevail upon their scanty marine to try their feeble efforts, that is not followed up with the hope of success, by the co-operation of traitors in this country. I think, therefore, I may venture to say, that when the crown does state by a message, that the information is received of the existence of such a design, we ought to be prepared in the best manner possible.

When we know that the enemy are forming a plan to invade this country; when we know that in former times, on such communications from the throne, our ancestors, without investigation, had recourse to the measure of enabling his Majesty to secure and detain those who are suspected of conspiring against his goverment, I say, we should be wanting to ourselves, if we hesitated in adopting the measure to which the honourable gentleman alluded, seemingly with a dislike, in one part of his speech, but which I hope this house will give effect to before we separate this night. It was my intention to have moved for that law immediately after disposing of the address; but that having suggested itself elsewhere, we may be enabled to give it the force of law more speedily. I hope the interval will not be a

great many minutes before we see that measure has received the sanction of another house of legislature. It is a measure that becomes necessary on grounds intimately connected with the subject now before us. I am very glad there is now no difference of opinion upon the main question; the union of this house is very desirable upon this point; and, therefore, although I may protest against some of the doctrines of the honourable gentleman who spoke last, I am unwilling to dwell upon the points on which we differ, because I am unwilling to disturb their unanimity.

The question upon the address was immediately put and agreed to *nemine contradicente*.

May 25, 1798.

MR. PITT, conformably to the notice he had previously given, and after stating that the object of his motion was precisely the same with that, for which a similar bill had been brought in in the year 1779, namely, to suspend for a limited time the protections which various descriptions of persons enjoy, to prevent them from being impressed into the service of the navy, moved for leave to bring a bill for the more effectual manning of his Majesty's navy; at the same time intimating, that, as the present alarming situation of the country made it necessary that this measure should be passed without any delay, he should wish that the bill might this day proceed through its different stages, with a suitable pause at each, if required, and that it should be sent to the Lords for their concurrence.

Mr. Tierney complained of the very extraordinary and precipitate manner in which the right honourable gentleman had called upon the house to adopt the measure proposed. He had heard no arguments, he said, that proved its propriety; he knew of no sudden emergency that urged its necessity; even if he had, some time ought to have been allowed him to weigh the force of such arguments, and examine the nature of such an emergency, before he proceeded to give three or four votes on a measure of which no notice of any sort had been given; and of which no idea had ever entered his mind. If the right honourable gentleman persisted in hurrying the bill through the house in the manner proposed, he must give it his decided negative, however reluctantly he opposed any measure that was said to be necessary to the safety of the

country. For, from what he had lately seen, he must view all the measures of ministers as hostile to the liberty of the subject; and the present measure he regarded with peculiar jealousy, as it went directly to rob them of the few remaining privileges they were still permitted to enjoy.

Mr. Pitt replied, that if every measure adopted against the designs of France, was to be considered as hostile to the liberty of this country, then, indeed, his idea of liberty differed very widely from that which seemed to be entertained by the honourable gentleman. The house would recollect, however that honourable gentleman might say to the contrary, that he had given notice of the present motion, though he had not judged it prudent then to explain the mode in which it was to be put into execution. Neither could it be fairly supposed, that the present measure was to be brought forward as the usual one for augmenting the navy. A bill of the nature of the latter was introduced about ten days ago; and at that time he stated to the house, that, if they acceded to the proposed augmentation of the navy, they must adopt some vigorous measure to make that augmentation effectual, as nothing but a law of a vigorous nature could succeed in making the intended number of seamen complete. When the honourable gentleman complained of the manner in which the bill was to be hurried through the house, and hinted that it was too frequently resorted to, he saw the suspension of the *habeas corpus* act was lurking in his mind. The honourable gentleman would have a long notice given of the present motion, and would retard its progress through the house. He acknowledges that, were it not passed in a day, those whom it might concern, might elude its effect, thus assigning himself the reason for its immediate adoption. But if the measure be necessary, and that a notice of it would enable its effect to be eluded, how can the honourable gentleman's opposition to it be accounted for, but from a desire to obstruct the defence of the country?

Mr. Tierney called the right honourable gentleman to order. This language Sir, said he, is surely not parliamentary, and upon you only can I call for protection.

The Speaker observed, that whatever had a tendency to throw suspicion on the sentiments of a member, if conveyed in language that clearly marked that intention, such language was, without doubt, irregular and unparliamentary; but if it argued no such intention, there was no room for censuring it as disorderly: if, therefore, it was the opinion of the House, that such was the fair import of the language used by the right honourable gentleman, they would judge of it accordingly; but they would first wait to hear the right honourable gentleman's explanation.

MR. PITT said, that he feared the house must wait a long time, if they waited for his explanation on the present subject. The sense of what he advanced was, that there was no distinction between the two cases in question. That if notice was to be given of the measure under consideration, that notice would only serve to elude its execution, and therefore no man could be justified in opposing the necessary expedition that made the measure ineffectual; or, if he did, he must surely appear to obstruct the measures employed for the defence of the country. He knew very well that it was unparliamentary to state the motives that actuated the opinions of gentlemen, but it was impossible to go into arguments in favour of a question, without sometimes hinting at the motives that induced an opposition to it. He submitted to the judgment of the house the propriety and necessity of the arguments he had urged, and he would not depart from any thing he had there advanced, by either retracting or explaining them.*

* In consequence of what passed between Mr. Pitt and Mr. Tierney on this occasion, a meeting took place on the 27th, at three o'clock in the afternoon, on Putney Heath. Mr. Pitt was accompanied by Mr. Ryder, and Mr. Tierney by Sir George Walpole.

After some ineffectual attempts, on the part of the seconds, to prevent further proceedings, the parties took their ground at the distance of twelve paces. A case of pistols was fired at the same moment without effect; a second case was also fired in the same way, Mr. Pitt firing his pistol in the air: the seconds then jointly interfered, and insisted that the matter should go no farther, it being their decided opinion that sufficient satisfaction had been given, and that the business was ended with perfect honour to both parties.

The bill afterwards went through all its stages, and was ordered to be carried to the Lords; from whom a message was returned in a few minutes, that their Lordships had agreed to the bill.

December 3, 1798.

Mr. Pitt moved the order of the day for the House to resolve itself into a Committee of Ways and Means, to consider of a supply to be granted to his Majesty.

The House having resolved itself into the said committee, Mr. Pitt further moved, that the act of the 38th of his present Majesty, chap. 16, for granting an aid or contribution to his Majesty, might be read, and that it might be an instruction to the committee to consider of the said act; which being agreed to, he then addressed the committee as follows:

Before I proceed to submit to the committee the very important matters which form the subject of this day's consideration, I conceive it necessary to take a diligent review of the general amount of the total services of the present year, and of the ways and means applicable to those services. Without adopting this method, I do not think it would be possible to inform your judgment with any degree of accuracy, respecting the propriety of the measure I have to propose, for raising a considerable part of the supplies within the year, or be able to enforce those arguments I shall adduce in support of that measure. It is a matter of extreme satisfaction to me, that it will appear to the committee from the estimate I shall now produce, compared with former estimates, that although our expenses are beyond what they ever were, yet that our means of supplying them are so ample and extensive, that the country is placed in a proud and eminent situation, beyond what it has enjoyed at any former period.

I shall begin by stating what has been voted as the amount of the supply under the head of the services for the navy, with the exception of what is necessary for transport services. All these

accounts have this day been laid before us; and it appears that the total sum for the ordinaries and extraordinaries of the navy and transport services amounts to 13,642,000*l.* being the same sum, within a very small amount, as was granted in the course of last session, and which I have the satisfaction of assuring the committee is likely to prove sufficient for the whole expenses of the navy, without leaving any necessity for augmentation. The next head of expense is the army, in which the estimates amount to 8,840,000*l.* Gentlemen will recollect the extraordinaries in the course of last session, to be incurred in 1798, were stated at 3,200,000*l.* There was also voted a sum of 1,000,000*l.* as a vote of credit, applicable as extraordinaries to unforeseen expenses. This vote of credit will cover all the extraordinary expenses to the end of the year, so that, as in the article of the navy, there will be no past arrears to be discharged. But with respect to the vote of credit for this year, one million will be wanted to discharge that amount issued in exchequer-bills. Under the article, then, of army expenditure, there remain the extraordinary services of the year 1799, which I may put at two millions. Thus the total amount, under the head of army, will be 8,840,000*l.* including the one million for the discharge of exchequer-bills issued, and two millions for the extraordinary services of 1799. Under the head of ordnance services, including the expenses which have not been provided for, there has been voted the sum of 1,570,000*l.* The next article is that of the miscellaneous services. The plantation estimates have already been voted, but there are other minuter parts of those services which have not yet undergone a discussion in this house. The amount will be rather less than it was last session. I state it 600,000*l.* To this is to be added the usual sum voted towards the redemption of the national debt, above the annual million, which is 200,000*l.* There are other sums, which are generally voted under the head of deficiency of grants. Among these is a sum due for interest on treasury and exchequer bills paid off, amounting to 565,000*l.*; the discount on prompt payments upon the loan, amounting to 210,000*l.*; the interest on

exchequer bills circulated within the year, and charged upon the succeeding year, 300,000*l.*; in addition to this, there is the deficiency of the land and malt in the act passed two years ago, amounting to 300,000*l.* These sums swell the total of the supply to 29,272,000*l.* This total, Sir, does not differ in any material degree from the amount of the supply of last session.

Towards raising this supply, it will naturally occur to the mind of every gentleman in the committee, that the same resources will be applicable as are always applicable at all periods, whether of peace or of war. The land and malt have always been taken at 2,750,000*l.*: there remains the lottery, which will not produce less than 200,000*l.* and the growing produce of the consolidated fund. I have stated these articles first, for reasons which will be obvious to the committee. These are the ordinary resources. The growing produce of the consolidated fund would amount for one year to 2,100,000*l.* but in the course of the present year that produce will be affected by some heavy burdens;—by the remains of charges in arrears; by the interest if it is still to remain a burden upon us, on the imperial loan and by the growing interest on such parts of loans raised on the credit of levying any tax, for which no interest has been provided. On the other hand, the growing produce will be swelled by the advances to the planters of Grenada, amounting to 800,000*l.* I take, therefore, the probable growing produce of the consolidated fund at 1,500,000*l.* In addition to this, and independently of the voluntary contributions, a tax was laid in the last session of parliament upon the exports and imports founded upon the peculiar situation of our trade, as it then stood. That tax, Sir, has not only yielded to the full amount of what I estimated it at, but has even exceeded it; and I have the satisfaction of finding, that now, when that trade is brought to the test of a duty upon the declarations of the parties themselves, allowing them indulgencies, and granting them a deduction of ten per cent.—I have, I repeat, Sir, the satisfaction of stating, that the total amount of our exports and imports exceeds, in a large degree, the largest sum that any man ever yet

ventured to state upon the subject. That duty I estimated to produce the sum of 1,200,000*l.* I have the best reason for believing that the actual produce of it will be much beyond that sum. In addition to this duty upon exports and imports, and which, as far as can be done without diminishing our resources, which must be contemplated with the greatest exultation, because they prove the extent of our commerce, in addition to that duty, now that the whole trade of the West Indies is centered in this country, a reduction may be made with advantage to the nation in the large sums paid upon drawbacks, and bounties of exports. Into this subject, however, it is not my intention to enter at the present moment. I mention it, because it will make an increase to the tax upon exports and imports, which I have every reason to believe will amount, with that increase, to 1,700,000*l.* I have thus enumerated the principal articles;

The land and malt. - - - - - - - - - - - -	*l.*2,750,000
Lottery - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -	200,000
The growing produce of the consolidated fund	1,500,000
The tax upon imports and exports - - - - -	1,700,000
Total	*l.* 6,150,000

The remainder of the sum is that which must be raised either by a tax within the year, in the same manner as the assessed tax bill of last year, or by a loan. It will be to be considered, how the committee will divide that remaining sum between them. The sum to be provided for is upwards of twenty-three millions. Gentlemen will recollect, that, in the debates upon the subject of the assessed taxes last session, two fundamental principles were established as the rule by which we should be guided in providing for the supplies for the service of the year. These were, first, to reduce the total amount to be at present raised by a loan; and next, as far as it was not reducible, to reduce it to such a limit, that no more loan should be raised than a temporary tax should defray within a limited time. In the first place, the tax acceded to by the house last session was for the

purpose of providing for the supplies of the year; and in the next place, for the purpose of extinguishing the loan raised in that year. From the modifications, however, which that measure underwent after its being first proposed, the produce of it was diminished to a considerable extent. Other means indeed were adopted to remedy the deficiency which was thus occasioned.—The voluntary and cheerful efforts which, so honourably to individuals, and to the country, came in aid of the deficit of the assessed taxes, and the superior produce of the exports and imports beyond the estimate, brought the amount of the sumi raised to that at which they had been calculated. The different articles were estimated at seven millions and a half, and this sums is fully covered by the actual receipt under the different heads. It gives me, indeed, the most heartfelt satisfaction to state, that notwithstanding the difficulties which the measure encountered from the shameful evasion, or rather the scandalous frauds by which its effects were counteracted, the total amount which was expected has yet been realized. The meanness which shrunk from fair and equal contribution has been compensated to the public by the voluntary exertions of patriotism. The produce of the assessed taxes, under all the modifications, and all the evasions, is four millions. I had taken it at four and a half after the modifications were adopted. This deficiency is supplied by the excess on the head of voluntary contributions. In proportion as the one had fallen short of the estimate, the other has gone beyond it in favour of the country. If I did not calculate the evasion, the fraud, and the meanness which have struggled to defeat the operation of the assessed taxes, and I mention it with shame that in a moment like the present, in a contest so awfully interesting to every individual and to the nation, there have been men base enough to avail themselves of the general modifications which were intended to relieve those who might have been called upon to contribute beyond their means, to avoid that fair assessment which corresponded with their circumstances, I am happy to find that the honour of the nation has been vindicated by the noble and generous aid of voluntary contribution, and

that the sum which I had stated is greatly exceeded. Not only in this country but in every part of the British dependencies the patriotic spirit has displayed itself, and wherever they were placed, the subjects of England have shewn themselves worthy of the relations by which they are connected with their country. Instead of 1,500,000*l.* the voluntary contributions already exceed two millions; and the sum of seven millions and a half, for which credit was taken, has been effective to the public service.

Satisfactory as it must be to review the circumstances to which we owe these advantages, and the benefits which the mode of raising the supplies to a considerable extent adopted last session has produced, it is unnecessary for me to state, that, however the principle may deserve our approbation, it is still much to be desired that its effects should be more extensive, and its application more efficient. It is in vain to disguise that, by the causes to which I have alluded, the full advantage of the principle has not been obtained. The wishes and the interest of individuals, I am sure, must unite in demanding a more comprehensive, a more equal, and a more vigorous application of a principle, the rare advantages of which we have been able to ascertain, if we have not yet been so fortunate as to enjoy. Last session those who acknowledged the importance of the principle of raising a considerable part of the supplies within the year, confined their objections to the proportion fixed upon the scale of the assessed taxes, as unequal in its application, and liable to great evasion in practice. Though not insensible of the weight of the objection, I then felt it my duty, convinced as I was of the immense advantages of the system, to adopt some visible criterion by which to estimate and to regulate the extent of contribution, if it was not possible to devise means of embracing fully every class of property, and every source of contribution. I felt it materially important to follow some durable, some apparent and sensible criterion, by which to apportion the burden. At the same time I felt, that although the assessed taxes furnished the most comprehensive, and most general, and the most efficient scale of con-

tribution, there necessarily must be much income, much wealth, great means, which were not included in its application. It now appears that not by any error in the calculation of our resources, not by any exaggeration of our wealth, but by the general facility of modification, by the anxiety to render the measure as little oppressive as possible, a defalcation has arisen which ought not to have taken place. Yet under the disadvantage and imperfections of an unequal and inadequate scale of application, the effects of the measure have tended to confirm our estimates of its benefits, and to encourage us to persevere in its principle. Every circumstance in our situation, every event in the retrospect of our affairs, every thing which strikes our view as we look around us, demonstrates the advantages of the system of raising a considerable part of the supplies within the year, and ought to induce us to enforce it more effectually to prevent those frauds, which an imperfect criterion and a loose facility of modification have introduced; to repress those evasions so disgraceful to the country, so injurious to those who honourably discharge their equal contribution, and, above all, so detrimental to the great object of national advantage which it is intended to promote. In these sentiments, our leading principle should be to guard against all evasion, to endeavour by a fair and strict application, to realize that full tenth, which it was the original purpose of the measure of the assessed taxes to obtain, and to extend this as far as possible in every direction, till it may be necessary clearly to mark the modification, or to renounce, in certain instances, the application of it altogether. If then, the committee assent to this principle, they must feel the necessity of following it up, by a more comprehensive scale and by more efficient provisions. They will perceive the necessity of obtaining a more specific statement of income, than the loose scale of modification, which under the former measure, permitted such fraud and evasion. If such a provision be requisite to correct the abuses of collection, to obviate the artifices of dishonesty, to extend the utility of the whole system, it will be found that many of the regulations of the old measure will be adapted to a more comprehensive and effi-

cient application of the principle. If regulations can be devised to prevent an undue obatement, and to proportion the burden to the real ability, means must be employed to reach those resources which, *primâ facie*, it is impossible under the present system of the assessed taxes to touch. While inaccuracy, fraud, inequality, be grievances, which it is desirable to remedy, it will be an additional satisfaction, that when compelled to adopt means to prevent the defects of which we complain, we shall be enabled likewise to improve and to extend the benefits we have obtained. The experience which we have had upon the subject, proves that we must correct and remedy, in order to secure the advantages which the measure is calculated to afford. It is in our power to make them our own. I think I can shew that whatever benefit the principle upon which we have begun to act, is fitted to bestow, may by a liberal, fair, and efficient application, be carried to an extent far greater than has yet been obtained, an extent equal to every object of great and magnanimous effort, to every purpose of national safety and glory, to every advantage of permanent credit and of increased prosperity.

Impressed then with the importance of the subject, convinced that we ought, as far as possible, to prevent all evasion and fraud, it remains for us to consider, by what means these defects may be redressed, by what means a more equal scale of contribution can be applied, and a more extensive effect obtained. For this purpose it is my intention to propose, that the presumption founded upon the assessed taxes shall be laid aside, and that a general tax shall be imposed upon all the leading branches of income. No scale of income indeed which can be devised will be perfectly free from the objection of inequality, or entirely cut off the possibility of evasion. All that can be attempted is, to approach as near as circumstances will permit to a fair and equal contribution. I trust that the opinion of the country will concur with the disposition of parliament to give that energy to our exertions, to give that stability to our resources, which our present situation and our future prosperity demand. I trust that all who value the national honour, and the national safety, will co-ope-

rate in the desirable purpose of obtaining, by an efficient and comprehensive tax upon real ability, every advantage which flourishing and invigorated resources can confer upon national efforts. The details of a measure which attempts an end so great and important, must necessarily require serious and mature deliberation. At present all that I can pretend to do is, to lay before the committee an outline of a plan which endeavours to combine every thing at which such a measure ought to aim. This outline I shall now proceed to develope to the committee as clearly and distinctly as I am able.

It will occur to every one to inquire what species of commissioners shall be vested with the power of fixing the rate of assessment under a measure which must leave a considerable discretionary power. In such commissioners several qualifications are in a particular manner desirable. They ought to be persons of a respectable situation in life; as far as possible removed from any suspicion of partiality, or any kind of undue influence; men of integrity and independence. From the experience in which we have had of the benefits derived from the voluntary exertions of such a body of commissioners, we may be able to ascertain in what classes to look for men qualified for the important functions which the office would impose. Still, however, I should consider it necessary to vary somewhat from the mode pursued in forming the commissioners of the land-tax. After much consideration, then, it occurs to me that, out of the commissioners appointed under the act for assessing the land-tax, a certain proportion should be taken with given qualifications. I should think that no man should be admitted to act as commissioner for the purposes to be afterwards specified, who does not possess 300*l.* per annum. To these, other persons of similar qualifications should be added, and the list so framed to be referred to the grand jury, or those who have served on the two last grand juries to form the commissioners. In case the party is dissatisfied with the decision of these commissioners, another body of commissioners should be formed, to whom an appeal may be carried. In commercial towns some special provisions will be necessary, adapted to the nature of circumstances.

The next point for consideration, then, is the mode of contribution which shall be adopted. On this head it is my intention to propose, that no income under 60*l.* a year shall be called upon to contribute, and that the scale of modification up to 200*l.* a year, as in the assessed taxes, shall be introduced with restriction. The quota which will then be called for ought to amount to a full tenth of the contributor's income. The mode proposed of obtaining this contribution differs from that pursued in the assessed taxes, as instead of trebling their amount, the statement of income is to proceed from the party himself. In doing this it is not proposed that income shall be distinctly laid open, but it shall only be declared that the assessment is beyond the proportion of a tenth of the income of the person on whom it is imposed. In this way I hope, that the disclosure at which many may revolt will be avoided, and at the same time every man will be under the necessity of contributing his fair and equal proportion. How then, it will be asked, is evasion and fraud to be checked? Knowing the difficulty of guessing what a man's real ability is, I do not think that the charge of fixing what is to be the rate, ought to be left to the commissioners. It would I am persuaded, be most acceptable to the general feeling, to make it the duty of a particular officer, as surveyor, to lay before the commissioners such grounds of doubt, as may occur to him on the fairness of the rate at which a party may have assessed himself. These doubts, and the reasons on which they are founded, are then to be transmitted by the surveyor to the commissioners, in order that they may call for farther explanation from the person concerned. When in the case of the assessed taxes we have had so much experience of the evasions which have taken place; when we see the consequences which have resulted from a vague rule of exemption, and an indefinite principle of deduction; when we see that, by the different modes by which exemptions were regulated, persons, who probably would have shrunk from a direct fraud, have been able by different pretences to disguise to themselves the fair and adequate proportion which they ought to have contributed, it becomes more than ever necessary

to render every case of exemption precise, and to guard every title to deduction from the danger of being abused. At the same time, under every disadvantage of the unrestricted application of deduction, and the easy commission of fraud, we have yet ample proof of our national wealth and general honesty. To prevent the country from suffering by dishonesty, to prevent the willing contributor from being taxed to the utmost proportion of his means, while his wealthy neighbour owes his exemption to meanness, it is necessary to guard with greater strictness against every chance of evasion. When doubts are entertained that a false statement has been given, it shall be competent for the commissioners to call for a specification of income. It will be necessary to simplify and to state with precision the different proportions of income arising from land, from trade, annuity, or profession, which shall entitle to deduction. The commissioners are then to say whether they are satisfied with the statement which has been given. The officer or surveyor is to be allowed to examine and to report whether there appears reason to believe that the assessment is adequate. When the day of examination arrives, the commissioners shall hear what the surveyor and the party have to alledge in support of the objection and the assessment, and examine other individuals. The schedule, which shall be drawn up in such a manner as accurately to define every case of exemption or deduction, shall be presented by the party, with his claim clearly specified. To the truth of the schedule he shall make oath. The party, however, shall not be compelled to answer; his books shall not be called for, nor his confidential clerks or agents examined. If, however, he declines to submit to the investigation of his books, and the examination of his clerks, and other means of ascertaining the truth, it shall be competent for the commissioners to fix the assessment, and their decision shall be final, unless he appeals to the higher commissioner. No disclosure is compulsory; but if the party is unwilling to disclose, he must acquiesce in the decision of the commissioners, who shall not be authorised to relieve without a full disclosure.

This, I am perfectly ready to admit, gives to the commissioners considerable power. But I think, Sir, I have stated enough to shew to the committee, that, unless some such powers be afforded under this act, the real and substantial effect of the measure will be entirely defeated. I think, too, I have proved, that commissioners, selected in the manner I have described, are as likely to be as free from all undue influence, and to act with as much integrity and honour, as any other set of men whatever. If, however, a better mode should be suggested, so far from opposing it, I shall consider it a a melioration and improvement of my plan. With respect to the information which may be communicated to the commissioners, I should propose that they shall be strictly sworn not to disclose such information, nor to avail themselves of it for any other purpose separate from the execution of the act. If any statement, however, should be made upon oath, which the commissioners shall think to be false, and which they may wish to bring to a trial, it must be obvious to the committee that then there ought to be afforded the means of carrying on a prosecution for perjury. But on no other ground should there be any disclosure of facts by the commissioners, or any of the other officers appointed to carry the act into execution.

Having said thus much, Sir, having laid down these general principles and outlines, I cannot feel, that if commissioners of the description I have alluded to can be found, bound to execute their duty fairly and impartially, and sworn to secresy—say, if such men can be selected, I cannot feel, however strong the objections may be against the disclosure of circumstances, that any statement made to such commissioners is liable to the general objection against public disclosures of the incomes and circumstances of individuals in a commercial country; at least, Sir, I am sure there is every disposition in the plan to guard against it. There is little danger, I conceive, that such commissioners will act partially, or will conduct themselves vexatiously; and, in my opinion, there does not remain any fair ground for jealousy in individuals, that a disclosure to such men will give to persons in the same line of life any advantages over them.

Perhaps, however, Sir, there is one class of men to whom it may be for the committee to determine whether the measure shall extend, and whether they ought not to remain excepions to the act. Among the descriptions of persons to whom it may remain for the committee to consider whether a disclosure would not be detrimental, is the class which includes the poorest persons engaged in mercantile concerns; a class whose gains are most precarious, whose credit may be most doubtful, and most injured by a disclosure—I speak of the persons engaged in retail trades, to whom the assessed tax bill of last session gave great indulgencies, considering that the relief of abatement was one of which they could not avail themselves, without greater inconvenience and injury to them, perhaps, than to persons of higher rank, and of a higher description of mercantile traders. I wish, therefore, the committee to consider whether it may not be as well to leave that class to pay on the mitigated rate of assessment to which they are liable under the assessed tax bill, as to subject them to the general rate of the present bill. It will also naturally enter into the consideration of the committee, what allowances or exemptions ought to be extended to other descriptions of persons. In the last act, certain allowances and abatements were granted to persons with large families. That principle it will certainly be proper to extend to this measure; and the only doubt which I entertain upon the subject is, whether it was carried far enough in the bill of last year. If this suggestion be admitted, it will naturally be a matter of doubt, whether the principle in the last bill, with respect to persons having no families, ought not to be extended. It will also very reasonably occur to the minds of the committee, that it is of the utmost importance to the due execution of the act, that, as far as the general principles can be laid down for establishing a rate of landed property, or what may be the proper average of incomes which are subject to average, the rates in the last act should be subject to correction and improvement. By the operation of these powers, and by the influence of these rules, we may expect to arrive more nearly at that fair proportion which each man ought to contribute towards the exigencies, and for the service of the country.

The next consideration to which I wish to direct the attention of the committee, is one liable to more difficulty and doubt, upon which gentlemen will be aware that every thing must be conjectural, but in which we are still not without lights to guide us—I mean as to the probable amount of a tax of this kind. The committee must be convinced, that what I shall state will be with doubt and uncertainty. I shall, however, submit to the view of the house the information I have collected, the authorities with which I am fortified, and the grounds upon which I proceed. And first, Sir, I shall proceed to state what is the first great object of income. I mean the property derived from land. Upon this point I have consulted the best opinions, and authors of the most acknowledged merit. Upon the subject of the rent of the land of this country, Sir William Petty is the earliest author whom I have consulted, but upon whom I shall not dwell much. At the time he wrote, the rent of land was stated at eight millions. In a subsequent period, in the beginning of this century, and in the reign of Queen Anne, two writers of credit, Davenant and King, represented the rent of land to be 14,000,000*l*. However they differed on other points, on this they both agreed. Posterior to that time it was a received opinion, that a land-tax of four shillings in the pound was equivalent to about two shillings of what would be collected on the real rents of the kingdom, which were stated to amount to twenty millions. Full twenty years ago this was said by a writer, who was also a member of this house, and who in a work he wrote, expressly recommended the very principle which I have submitted to the committee this day. The same estimate was stated, and the same opinion was countenanced by the authority of the celebrated author of the Treatise on the Wealth of Nations, Adam Smith. He received it as a statement generally admitted, and sufficiently proved, that the rent of the land in the kingdom was twenty millions yearly. In a work published as long ago as the year 1774, Mr. Arthur Young, who had made agricultural pursuits his study, has advanced the same opinion. I mention all these authorities, to shew what has

been the amount of the rent of land at different periods. I state them also to shew how great has been the increase upon it within the last ten years; but if any of those authorities should still not be free from exaggeration, the committee will at least see that any estimate which I may make is not likely to be one which is much beyond probability. I have had also, Sir, the advantage of other inquiries made expressly by a body who have made the cultivation of the land their peculiar province—I mean the board of agriculture. I allude more particularly to one report published by a person who made this part of the subject his study, the report drawn up by Mr. Middleton. All these, checked with other examinations, state the whole amount of the cultivated land of the country to amount to little less than forty millions of acres. Any attempt to state what is the average value of these forty millions of acres, must be, the committee will see, in its nature extremely uncertain. As far as the inquiries I have made have enabled me to obtain any information, I find that many persons most conversant on the subject believe the average value to be fifteen shillings per acre. I shall, however, take it at no more than twelve shillings and six-pence. In doing this, perhaps, I am rather under the mark, but I will put the average value at twenty-five millions a year. And gentlemen surely will see, that when I take the number of acres at forty millions, and the average value at only twelve shillings and six-pence per acre, the result is only an increase of five millions beyond what it was twenty years ago, and that therefore I cannot be considered as a very sanguine calculator. However, in this part of the subject, I desire the committee to bear in mind, that it will be proper to propose a reduction for all under 60*l.* a year, and that the same modifications be admitted into this act as in the assessed tax bill—I mean the scale of income from 60*l.* to 200*l.* a year, and rising from a one hundred and twentieth part to a tenth. I mean on this account to assume a deduction of one-fifth, and to state the taxable property at only twenty millions.

I shall next proceed to state that part of income from land which belongs to the tenant. I propose to value every man ac-

cording to his rent, making only a deduction for repairs. What I shall suggest for the further consideration of the committee, is three-fourths of the rack rent which the tenant pays to the landlord. The value of the income from land which belongs to the tenant I take at nineteen millions; the income to the landlord, as I have before said, at twenty-five millions. Instead of deducting only one-fifth, as I have suggested with respect to the landlord, I shall propose with respect to the tenant, to deduct two-thirds, leaving five millions as the taxable property of the tenants. The next income arising from land, is an income which is received neither by the landlord, nor by the tenant—I mean what is received from tithes. This is an income enjoyed, as the committee know, either by lay impropriators, or by the clergy. The statements of the amount of the tithes are different; but I estimate the value of them to be five millions. If gentlemen suppose the amount of the cultivated land in the country to be forty millions of acres, and the average value to be twenty-five millions, they will find, I believe, my valuation to be very moderate: it is also Mr. Arthur Young's statement. Upon this subject of tithes, I propose to allow a deduction of one-fifth, though, perhaps, I may be considered as stating the reduction too largely; but gentlemen will consider the allowance to be made for poor livings.

Another species of property is that which arises from mines, and from shares in canals. There is also another property which I have not included in the rents of land, I mean the property arising from the sale of timber. I take all these three, the mines, canals, and timber, at three millions.

Another species of rent is that received for houses. I propose to proceed upon the rate which was followed in the act of last session. The committee are aware, that to establish accurately the rent of houses has ever been found to be impracticable, particularly of houses of the higher description of rent, which have always been undervalued. Out of the number of 700,000 houses, 250,000 are calculated to pay to the assessed taxes; I shall therefore take the rent of houses at no more than six millions.

In the early statements to which I have alluded, the profits gained by the professors of the law alone are estimated at one million and a half; I cannot suppose that they are at all diminished. Allowing, besides, for all the branches of the medical profession, I conceive that two millions is a very small sum as the amount of the incomes arising from the professions.

The next head of income relates to the profits of retail trade: but there are persons of a certain description, with respect to whom it will be necessary to make some allowance. The reduction I shall propose to take at one eighth of the net sum of the profits of the trade of Great Britain, after which there will remain a sum of 5,000,000*l.* applicable to the general operation of the tax.

There will then remain another article of taxation, which is the income spent in this country by persons who derive it from other parts of the world; and unquestionably all who reside in this kingdom, and draw their means from sources out of it, cannot be dissatisfied at contributing to their own support and protection. Of this description, the only persons I shall think it necessary to estimate are those whose incomes arise from their having property in Ireland, and who reside in this country, and persons owning estates in the West-Indies, or receiving the interest of mortgages on estates in that part of the world. With respect to those persons whose incomes arise from Ireland, I have no accurate data in order to estimate the amount; but I believe it is the generally received opinion, that the property of persons of this description amounted to at least 1,000,000*l.* a considerable time since, and now, from the increase of rents, it may reasonably be estimated far beyond that sum. With respect to the incomes of estates in the West Indies, the total amount cannot be estimated at less than 7,000,000*l.* sterling, and far the greater amount is produced from the property of persons residing in Great Britain, who either own estates, or have mortgages upon them for which they receive interest. From that are to be deducted the amount of the exports carried out, and the charge

of cultivating the estates in the West Indies; after which deduction, I estimate the produce of income in the West Indies at four millions, and I believe I run no danger of stating it too high. Thus it appears I may fairly estimate at five millions the whole produce of income arising beyond seas, and enjoyed by persons in this country.

The next description of property which will come under the consideration of the committee as a source for the proposed tax, is the income of persons not in trade. Under this head will be included annuities of all kinds, public and private mortgages, and income arising from money lent upon securities under various denominations. At the same time the committee however will go along with me in seeing that, in estimating the general rental of the land of England, I have taken it with all its burdens, and consequently have included the mortgages. In the practical detail of the measure, it will come to be decided whether it shall fall on the land owner, or on the mortgagee. In respect, therefore, of this description of property, I do not now make any distinct estimate. Whatever is lent upon the security of land will naturally come forth in the process of this tax, and as we have no accurate means of judging of the amount of the mortgaged property in England, I avoid taking any particular sum under the distinct head. With respect to private annuities of another kind, it is also difficult to ascertain their amount. Not so with regard to public annuities; we have no difficulty of ascertaining the exact amount of the annuities paid by the public to individuals, and I shall have no hesitation in submitting to the committee, that when a general assessment upon income is to take place, no distinction ought to be made as to the sources from which that income may arise. There can be no fair objection taken by the stockholder upon the occasion; there can be no question of a breach of good faith, of national stipulation with the public creditor, by thus imposing upon him what every other subject of the realm is to incur. The public creditor enjoys his security under the most sacred obligations of the

state, and the committee will do me the justice to recollect, that, whenever an idea has been started in debate, of imposing upon the stockholders, separately and distinctly, any sort of tax, I have been prepared to reprobate the attempt, as utterly inconsistent with good faith and public engagements. Parliament has always gone along with me in the feeling that no such tax ought to be levied upon them, and they have uniformly acted upon this feeling, on the principle, that, as the public creditors came forward and lent their money to the state in the moment of its necessity, while at the same time they bore, in common with every other description of his Majesty's subjects, the taxes on consumption, they were to be secured against any imposts, distinctly levelled at them as annuitants of the public; and the parliament has felt this more particularly from the recollection of the duty which they owe to persons who had embarked so much, and identified themselves so intimately with the state. Against any direct tax upon the stockholder, then, I am sure the committee, as well as myself, would set themselves in opposition; but the matter is materially reversed, when a tax is to be levied upon the income of every description of persons in the realm; when it is no longer in the power of the stockholder to say, I could avoid this tax by removing my property from the funds to landed security, or to trade; every argument against including him in the assessment is withdrawn. The protection yielded to the stockholder, is the same as to the landholder, the merchant, and the manufacturer. The duty, therefore, is the same, and every other description of persons in the country would have a right to complain, if, when they are called upon for a sacrifice of this extraordinary nature, so numerous a body of persons were to be exempted from the assessment. I am confident, therefore, that every gentleman who hears me, will agree that the principle of the measure is not liable to any imputation of breach of faith. It cannot be called a resumption of the annuity that has been granted to the public creditors, nor in the most remote degree an infringement of the contract that was originally

made with them. They are, in this instance, only to do that which every other body of men within the kingdom are to do; they are to make a sacrifice of part of their income to the necessities of the state, and they are to do it upon the principle of giving security and permanence to all which they possess. I have detained the committee longer upon this head than I should otherwise have done, because I am aware that objections may be lightly and loosely thrown out to this part of the measure. I should say to the stockholder, as one of the public, if you expect from the state the protection which is common to us all, you ought also to make the sacrifice which we are called upon to make. It is not peculiar to you, it does not belong to the quality of your income, but it is made general, and required from all; you could not embark your capital in any other species of security in which it would not be subject to the same charge. I do not know what objection the stockholder could make to this appeal. I include, therefore, the public annuitants in the view of the proposed tax, and there is no difficulty in estimating the amount of this species of income. At the same time, it is to be taken into consideration, that all that part of the public annuities which have been redeemed by the nation, is to be exempted from the charge of the tax. Taking the amount of the redemption, therefore, at what it now appears to be, the rental of the public annuitants may be estimated at 15,000,000*l.*; but here, as in all the other cases, both of the land and rental, and of other sources of property, there will, of course, be admitted the same exemptions to all annuitants who have less than 60*l.* a year, and the same modifications to all who possess from 60*l.* to 200*l.* a year. At the same time it is to be considered, that these exemptions and modifications are only to apply to those individuals whose whole income amounts to less than 200*l.* a year. If persons possess incomes from various sources, they are to be calculated in the aggregate; for the exemption or the modification will not apply, if the whole income should not be under the stipulated sum. I am sure, that I shall over-rate the amount of

these exemptions and modifications, when I deduct one-fifth from the sum that I have stated the public annuities to be; but I do not admit that deduction, and therefore state the total of the income from the public funds at 12,000,000*l.*

There now remain, Mr. Chairman, the other great sources of trade to the inhabitants of this country;—the produce of trade, foreign and domestic: and this branch of income is, in its nature, more difficult of estimate than any other. We have, however, lights and aids by which we may come to a knowledge of a material part, at least, of this source of national wealth, I mean the produce of our foreign trade. By the recent acts which have been passed, the amounts of the imports and exports have been ascertained with such a degree of accuracy, as to enable us to form a tolerable judgment of the amount of the capital embarked in this branch of our trade, and, consequently, to form an estimate of the profits accruing from it. By the late act for the insurance of produce and manufactures exported, as well as by the recent act of which I have spoken, for the laying a duty on convoys, we have been able, more clearly than heretofore, to ascertain the amount and value of this trade, since we have not only the estimate and calculation that is made by the revenue, but the declarations of the persons engaged in the trade themselves, upon which the duty is paid: and by these guides we are able to ascertain that the capital employed in this way is certainly not less than 80,000,000*l.* sterling. Less it cannot be by the proof of the insurance act, which has now lasted two years, but it may be considerably more, because it is a well-known thing that merchants stand a part of the risk themselves, and do not insure to the full amount of the goods they export. But taking the amount at 80,000,000*l.* the calculation corresponds with the view of our foreign commerce, which has been recently made by our most accurate calculators; and in all these estimates I wish rather to be under than over the mark. I state the amount of the capital, therefore, embarked in our foreign trade at 80,000,000*l.*; and assuming this as the capital, the next question is, what we

ought to take as the profit to all the description of persons employed in carrying on this branch of our trade? In estimating this, we must necessarily include in our view, not merely the merchant who exports, but all the orders and descriptions of persons from the manufacturer upwards, who are any way connected with our export trade. Under this head come in the profits of brokerage, wharfage, and carriage, with all the other contributory trades connected with foreign commerce; and I am sure the committee will agree with me, that I make a moderate calculation, when I estimate the average of the profits upon the capital of 80,000,000*l.* at 15 per cent. I take, therefore, 12,000,000*l.* as the income of all the persons connected with the foreign trade of this kingdom.

There now remains that which more than any other branch of our income baffles the power of scrutiny, and affords even very limited grounds for conjecture; I mean the profits arising from domestic trade and manufacture. Here the many descriptions of persons whose skill and industry are the source of income in all the progress of our arts and manufactures, from the first preparation of the rude and raw material to its state of perfection, serve to make calculation almost impossible from their variety and extent. Even here, however, we have some means of forming an idea. Of the general capital of 80,000,000*l.* employed in the foreign trade, it has been pretty accurately determined, that about 30,000,000*l.* are destined and employed in the export of the leading manufactures of England. I am sure, then, that the committee will go along with me in saying, that the amount of the capital and sum employed in internal trade must be four times the amount of our export of British manufactures. When we look at the vast machine of trade in all its parts, let any gentleman ask himself whether, in the woollen manufactures, cotton, linen, hardware, pottery, and in all the other great and leading branches of manufacture, there can be a less sum employed than four times the amount of that which is appropriated by the merchant for the purposes of exportation? Viewing all the enor-

mous capital invested in domestic manufacture, I cannot take it at less than 120,000,000*l.* and upon this capital I estimate the gain at no more than 15 per cent. making a sum of 18,000,000*l.* per annum of income.

There is one other description of income which, though it embraces a vast variety of individuals, is reducible to none of the former heads, but comes naturally to be included in the article of domestic trade; I mean artisans, architects, brewers, distillers, builders, brickmakers, masons, carpenters, and all that innumerable class of persons who, by skill in their professions, draw their incomes from the general prosperity of the country. The committee, from their general knowledge of the kingdom, will at once perceive how numerous and how varied this class of persons must be, and how utterly impossible it is to arrive at an accurate criterion of the general amount of their gains. I am sure, however, that they will agree with me that I understate it, when I take it at 10,000,000*l.* per annum. I thus estimate the whole amount of our internal manufactures and trade at 28,000,000*l.* a year.

I have thus rapidly gone through all the distinct branches of national rental, and of national profits, from which we have to derive the tax that I mean to propose to you, without presuming to think that I have been able to do it with that accuracy of detail which can only be derived from practice, or with that certainty upon which you ought to repose. I have, however, through the whole, been anxious to understate the amount of the estimate as collected from the best sources of calculation, and to overrate the exemptions and deductions that it would be necessary to make from each. The committee, who have gone along with me in my details, will see that I make the whole sum of annual rental and profits, after making the deductions which I think reasonable, 102,000,000*l.* sterling.

For the sake of greater clearness, I will recapitulate the heads in the same order that I have followed:

The land rental, then, after deducting one-fifth, I estimate at	£20,000,000
The tenant's rental of land, deducting two-thirds of the rack rent, I take at	6,000,000
The amount of tythes, deducting one-fifth	4,000,000
The produce of mines, canal-navigation, &c. deducting one-fifth	3,000,000
The rental of houses, deducting one-fifth	5,000,000
The profits of professions	2,000,000
The rental of Scotland, taking it at one-eighth of that of England	5,000,000
The income of persons resident in Great Britain, drawn from possessions beyond seas	5,000,000
The amount of annuities from the public funds, after deducting one-fifth for exemptions and modifications	12,000,000
The profits on the capital employed in our foreign commerce	12,000,000
The profits on the capital employed in domestic trade, and the profits of skill and industry	28,000,000
In all	£102,000,000

Upon this sum a tax of 10 per cent. is likely to produce 10,000,000*l.* a year, and this is the sum which is likely to result from the measure, and at which I shall assume it. I flatter myself that I have been extremely careful not to overstate any part of the sources.

Now, suppo ing that ten millions is the sum thus collected, gentlemen will recollect that, in the last session of parliament, the assessed taxes were the only part of the public resources which were mortgaged for the sum of 8,000,000*l.* borrowed for the public service in 1797. I should think it my duty, therefore, that the sum now proposed to be raised in lieu of the assessed taxes, should, after its appropriation to the supplies of the present year, remain as a pledge for the discharge of that sum for which the assessed taxes were a security, and also for the

discharge of the loan of the present year, beyond what will be paid out of the sinking fund. Taking the assessed taxes at four millions, they would have been mortgaged for two years after peace;—and thus the advantage of this measure is this, that no greater sums will be raised on any individuals than those which have been hitherto paid, at least by such as have rendered the measure of the legislature effectual; they will be relieved of a greater than a proportional share of their burthen, and the duration of the burthen will not be half the time. This is a recommendation of the justice and expediency which must be felt by the people at large. But it does not stop here; it looks anxiously to the alleviation of the burthens of the country, by a great temporary exertion; it looks to the equality of the tax, and the general efficacy of the measure, conscious that on them depends our success in the great cause in which we are engaged.—That it is to furnish the means of providing for the debt created in two years, within the same period we formerly provided for the debt created in one. In the mode of applying the sum now to be raised, there are different ways. The sum which the assessed taxes were applied to discharge last year amounted to eight millions; it would be only to borrow a sum equal to the debt to supply the deficiency; but it occurs, however, to me, that a more simple and direct mode is, to apply this sum, in the first instance, to the supplies of the year, but at the same time to enact, that the tax shall continue till it has discharged the debt for which the assessed taxes were mortgaged, and then to make a farther charge for what may be borrowed beyond what the sinking fund will discharge.

Supposing this ten per cent. on income produces 10,000,000*l.* the period when I should propose it to take effect would be the 5th of April next. I should propose the repeal of the former assessed taxes at the same period; but from the calculation I have made, four millions and a half will be raised from the first of February, 1798, to the first of February, 1799. It would, therefore, be more beneficial to the object I have in view to commence the operation of this new measure at an earlier period,

because of the benefit of the increased rate of taxation; but there will be the addition of what will come in under the assessed taxes, which will amount to 700,000*l.* Thus there will be raised, 10,700,000*l.* But this is not applicable to the whole of the subject; for gentlemen will recollect, that the interest of the 8,000,000*l.* was also charged on the assessed taxes. The interest will continue in the course of the present year, to which also is to be added the interest of whatever loan may be made this year. This will amount to about one million five hundred thousand pounds, which leaves the sum of nine millions two hundred thousand pounds, as applicable to the services of the present year. This aid would be all that is necessary to furnish the ways and means for the supplies, except as to the sum of twenty-four millions. Fourteen millions, therefore, is the sum necessary to be raised by loan, of which, however, four millions and a half is discharged by the operation of the sinking fund, consequently nine millions and a half is the whole sum to be added to the national debt. I wish, therefore, to lay this down as a principle, that nine millions and a half is the sum to be raised this year, for which I should propose to charge as a mortgage the income tax, after discharging the former mortgage. This gives a general view of the amount of the services of the year, and the ways and means to defray them. I have also stated, to the best of my power, the possible amount of every article proposed as the subject of taxation.

I trust that it will not be necessary for me to go into any detail of argument to convince the committee of the advantages of the beneficial mode adopted last session, of raising a considerable part of the supplies within the year. The propriety of the measure has been recognized, and felt in a way the most gratifying to the feelings and to the pride of every Englishman. The principle has been proved to be the most wise and beneficial, though in the manner of carrying it into practice it has been so shamefully and grossly evaded. The experience which we have had, points out the propriety of correcting the errors of that plan, and of enforcing and extending the principle. If we have been

able, from the benefits of that measure, so evaded and crippled, to do so much, it is obviously our duty to seek for the means of perfecting the plan upon which we are set out; and if we can find regulations and checks against the abuses that have been committed, it is surely wise and proper that they should be made to apply to a more general and extensive scheme than that which we have already tried. It no longer rests upon theory, or upon reasoning; it is recommended to us by the surest test of experience; and if, by the efficacy of this plan, we have been able to disappoint the hopes of the enemy;—to rise above all the attempts which they made to disturb our domestic tranquillity;—to remove the apprehensions of the despondent, and to shew them that all their fears of our being unable to continue the contest, were vain;—to assert the high and proud distinction which we took in the maintenance of genuine government and social order;—if we have been able thereby to animate the public spirit of Europe, to revive its dismayed energy, and to give a turn to the political aspect of the world, favourable to the cause of humanity, shall we not persevere in a course which has been so fruitful of good? If we have proved that, at the end of the sixth year of war, unsubdued by all the exertions and sacrifices we have made, our commerce is flourishing beyond the example of any year even of peace; if our revenues are undiminished; if new means of vigour are daily presenting themselves to our grasp; if our efforts have been crowned with the most perfect success; if the public sentiment be firm and united in the justice and necessity of the cause in which we are embarked; if every motive to exertion continues the same, and every effort we have made in the cause is a source only of exultation and pride to the heart; if, by the efficacy of those efforts, we have now the expectation of accomplishing the great object of all our sacrifices and all our labours; if despondency be dissipated at home, and confidence created abroad, shall we not persevere in a course so fairly calculated to bring us to a happy issue? Let us do justice to ourselves. It is not merely owing to the dazzling events of the campaign that we are indebted for the proud station

in which we now stand, great and glorious as those achievements have been, which cannot fail to be a source of exultation to every British bosom. I shall not detract from the high renown of all those persons to whose skill, vigour, and determination, we are indebted for the achievements that have astonished and aroused Europe, when I say, that it is not altogether owing to them that we now feel ourselves in a situation so proud and consoling. The grand and important changes which have been effected in Europe, are not merely to be ascribed to the promptitude, vigilance, skill, and vigour, of our naval department, whose merits no man can feel, or can estimate, more highly than I do; nor to the heroism, zeal, patriotism, and devotion, of our transcendant commanders—and I speak particularly of that great commander * whose services fill every bosom with rapturous emotion, and who will never cease to derive from the gratitude of his countrymen the tribute of his worth—nor is it to the unparalleled perseverance, valour, and wonders performed by our gallant fleets, which have raised the British name to a distinction unknown even to her former annals, that we are to ascribe all the advantages of our present posture. No, we must also do justice to the wisdom, energy, and determination of the parliament, who have furnished the means, and the power, by which all the rest was sustained and accomplished. Through them all the departments of his Majesty's government had the means of employing the force whose achievements have been so brilliant; through the wisdom of parliament the resources of the country have been called forth, and its spirit embodied in a manner unexampled in its history. By their firmness, magnanimity, and devotion to the cause, not merely of our own individual safety, but of the cause of mankind in general, we have been enabled to stand forth the saviours of the earth. No difficulties have stood in our way: no sacrifices have been thought too great for us to make; a common feeling of danger has produced a common spirit of exertion, and we have cheerfully come

* Lord Nelson.

forward with a surrender of a part of our property as a salvage, not merely for recovering ourselves, but for the general recovery of mankind. We have presented a phenomenon in the character of nations.

It has often been thought, and has been the theme of historians, that as nations became mercantile, they lost in martial spirit what they gained in commercial avidity; that it is of the essence of trade to be sordid, and that high notions of honour are incompatible with the prosecution of traffic. This hypothesis has been proved to be false; for in the memorable era of the past year Great Britain has exhibited the glorious example of a nation shewing the most universal spirit of military heroism, at a time when she had acquired the most flourishing degree of national commerce. In no time of the proudest antiquity could the people of Great Britain exhibit a more dignified character of martial spirit than they have during the last year, when they have also risen to the greatest point of commercial advantage; and, Mr. Chairman, they are not insensible of the benefits, as well as of the glory, they have acquired: they know and feel that the most manly course has also been the most prudent, and they are sensible that, by bravely resisting the torrent with which they were threatened, instead of striking balances on their fate, and looking to the averages of profit and loss, on standing out, or of yielding to the tempest, they have given to themselves not merely security, but lustre and fame. If they had, on the contrary, submitted to purchase a suspension of danger and a mere pause of war, they felt that they could only have purchased the means of future and more deplorable mischief, marked with the stamp of impoverishment and degradation; they feel therefore, that, in pursuing the path which duty and honour prescribed, they have also trod in the path of prudence and economy. They have secured to themselves permanent peace, and future repose, and have given an animating example to the world of the advantages of vigour, constancy, and union. If the world shall not be disposed to take the benefit of this example, Great Britain has at least the consolation to know,

that she has given them the power. And if I were disposed, Sir, to pay regard to drier and colder maxims of policy, I should say, that every regard even to prudent economy would point out the course which we have taken, as the most advantageous for a people to pursue. It will be manifest to every gentleman on the slightest consideration of the subject, that, in the end, the measure of raising the supplies within the year is the cheapest and the most salutary course that a wise people can pursue; and when it is considered that there is a saving of at least one twelfth upon all that is raised, gentlemen will not suffer a superstitious fear, and jealousy of the danger of exposing the secrecy of income, to combat with a measure that is so pregnant with benefits to the nation. If gentlemen will take into their consideration the probable duration of peace and war, calculated from the experience of past times, they will be convinced of the immeasureable importance of striving to raise the supplies within the year, rather than accumulating a permanent debt. The experience of the last hundred, fifty, or forty years, will shew how little confidence we can have in the duration of peace, and it ought to convince us, how important it is to establish a system, that will prepare us for every emergency, give stability to strength, and perpetual renovations to resource. I think, I could make it apparent to gentlemen, that in any war, of the duration of six years, the plan of funding all the expenses to be incurred in carrying it on, would leave at the end of it a greater burden permanently upon the nation than would be sustained, than they would have to incur for the six years only of its continuance, and one year beyond it, provided that they made the sacrifice of a tenth of their income. In the old, unwise, and destructive way of raising the supplies by a permanent fund, without any provision for its redemption, a war so carried on entails the burden upon the age and upon their posterity for ever. This has, to be sure, in a great measure, been done away and corrected, by the salutary and valuable system which has been adopted of the redemption fund. But that fund cannot accomplish the end in a shorter period than forty years, and during

all that time the expenses of a war so funded must weigh down and press upon the people. If, on the contrary, it had at an early period of our history been resolved to adopt the present mode of raising the supplies within the year; if, for instance, after the peace of Aix la Chapelle, the scheme of redemption even had been adopted, and persevered in to this time, we should not now, for the seventh year of the war, have had more to raise from the pockets of the people than what we have now to pay of permanent taxes, together with about a fourth of what it would be necessary to lay on in addition for this year. Fortunately we have at last established the redemption fund: the benefits of it are already felt; they will every year be more and more acknowledged; and in addition to this it is only necessary, that instead of consulting a present advantage, and throwing the burthen, as heretofore, upon posterity, we shall fairly meet it ourselves, and lay the foundation of a system that shall make us independent of all the future events of the world.

I am sure that, in deliberating upon the advantages of this system, gentlemen, whose liberal and exalted views go beyond the mere present convenience of the moment, and are not limited to the period of the interest which they may themselves take in public affairs, or even to the period of their own existence, but look with a provident affection to the independence and happiness of a generation unborn, will feel and recognise the wisdom of a system that has for its principle the permanency of British grandeur. You will feel that it is not only to the splendour of your arms, to the achievements of your fleets, that you are indebted for the high distinction which you at present enjoy; but also to the wisdom of the councils which you have adopted in taking advantage of the influence which your happy constitution confers beyond the example of any other people, and by which you have given a grand and edifying lesson to dismayed Europe, that safety, honour, and repose, must ever depend upon the energy with which danger is met and resisted. You have shewn the power of self-defence, which is permanent and unassailable: standing upon the principles you have assumed, the wild and extravagant

hopes of the enemy will be thwarted; Europe will be aroused and animated to adopt a course so honourable; and surely with the means of persevering thus obvious, you will not think it prudent or necessary to shrink from the principles you have adopted, or take shelter in a peace which might be obtained by a more temporizing conduct, but which would neither be safe nor durable. But, Sir, I cannot encourage any sentiment so degrading; I feel in common with every gentleman who hears me, the proud situation in which we have been placed, and the importance it has given us in the scale of nations. The rank that we now hold, I trust, we shall continue to cherish, and that, pursuing the same glorious course, we shall all of us feel it to be a source of pride and consolation that we are the subjects of the king of Great Britain. I will not detain you longer, Sir, but will move for the first of my series of resolutions in carrying the plan of taxation into execution, which I have endeavoured to detail.

The resolutions were as follow:

"Resolved,

"That it is the opinion of this committee, that so much of an act made in the last session of parliament, intituled, 'An Act for granting to his Majesty an Aid and Contribution for the Prosecution of the War,' as charges any person with an additional duty in proportion to the amount of the rates or duties to which, prior to the 5th day of April, 1798, such person was assessed, according to any assessment made in pursuance of any act of parliament in force at the time of passing the said act of the last session, be repealed.

"Resolved,

"That it is the opinion of this committee, that, towards raising the supply granted to his Majesty, there be charged annually, during a term to be limited, the several rates and duties following, upon all income arising from property in Great Britain, belonging to any of his Majesty's subjects, although not resident in Great Britain; and upon all income of every person residing in Great Britain, and of every body politic or corporate, or company, fraternity, or society of persons, whether corporate or not corporate, in Great Britain, whether any such income shall arise from lands, tenements, or hereditaments, wheresoever the same shall be situated in Great Britain, or elsewhere; or from any kind of personal property, or other property whatever; or from any profession, office, employment, trade, or vocation; that is to say,

One one-hundred-and twentieth part of such income, if the same shall amount unto 60l. per annum, and shall be under 65l. per annum.

One ninety-fifth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 65l. but shall be under 70l.

One seventieth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 70l. but shall be under 75l.

One sixty-fifth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 75l. but shall be under 80l.

One sixtieth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 80l. but shall be under 85l.

One fifty-fifth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 85l. but shall be under 90l.

One fiftieth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 90l. but shall be under 95l.

One forty-fifth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 95l. but shall be under 100l.

One fortieth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 100l. but shall be under 105l.

One thirty-eighth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 105l. but but shall be under 110l.

One thirty-sixth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 110l. but shall be under 115l.

One thirty-fourth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 115l. but shall be under 120l.

One thirty-second part of such income, if the same shall amount to 120l. but shall be under 125l.

One thirtieth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 125l. but shall be under 130l.

One twenty-eighth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 130l. but shall be under 135l.

One twenty-sixth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 135l. but shall be under 140l.

One twenty-fourth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 140l. but shall be under 145l.

One twenty-second part of such income, if the same shall amount to 145l. but shall be under 150l.

One twentieth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 150l. but shall be under 155l.

One nineteenth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 155l. but shall be under 160l.

One eighteenth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 160l. but shall be under 165l.

One seventeenth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 165l. but shall be under 170l.

One sixteenth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 170l. but shall be under 175l.

One fifteenth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 175l. but shall be under 180l.

One fourteenth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 180l. but shall be under 185l.

One thirteenth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 185l. but shall be under 190l.

One twelfth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 190l. but shall be under 195l.

One eleventh part of such income, if the same shall amount to 195l. but shall be under 200l.

And one tenth part of such income, if the same shall amount to 200l. or upwards.

The resolutions were agreed to, and the report was ordered to be received on the following day.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

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